

STATEMENT BY LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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Statement by
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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to represent my country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, at this momentous conference, UNCTAD XI. .:

First of all, I like to thank the government of Brazil for the warm welcome, and the excellent facilities provided for the conference; I also wish to thank Secretary General Ricupero of UNCTAD and his staff for their immense work in organising this important event.

The principal theme of this conference is well chosen. It will complement our previous commitments made at UNCTAD X and the 3rd LDCs UN conference.

The developing countries are going through an era of new economic awakening, an era in which they are attempting to enhance the benefits of economic development and to improve the livelihoods of their people. In general these countries are going through a period of economic liberalisation and globalisation. They are working hard to realize the benefits of these processes by trying to reach the markets of developed countries.

More particularly for LDCs, trade is very useful for their integration to the world economy, and for achieving accelerated economic growth.

As we all know, my country, Laos is a landlocked LDC. Since the mid 1980s we have been implementing a comprehensive reform program to transform the economy from a centrally planned to a free market one. Much progress has been achieved, but we have been careful to proceed at a sustainable pace. With membership in ASEAN, we are already integrated regionally. For enhanced global integration we have applied for accession to WTO.

Last year we completed a comprehensive socio-economic development strategy called the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP). This has been well received by our donor community. NPEP addresses the UN Millennium development goals, and more emphatically the goal on poverty eradication. Our overarching goal is mass poverty eradication by 2010 and achieving high levels of growth sufficient to exit the group of LDCs by the year 2020.

Lao PDR is also giving high priority to trade as a means of accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty. To this end we are mainstreaming trade into all national development and poverty reductions strategies. In this effort we are seeking technical assistance for trade related capacity building under projects such as Train For Trade and Integrated Framework. We are also improving our competition policies and consumer protection measures to make the trading environment more efficient and fair. We encourage foreign investment with very attractive and liberal policies. In short our economic and trade policies are open and outward-looking.

Thus, we, on our part, have made a significant effort to liberalise and integrate with the world economy. I am sure almost all other LDCs and developing countries are making similar efforts. However, what good of these efforts if they are not matched with similar efforts by our developed counterparts? All our efforts to liberalise and reach out to the world will be in vain if we face stiff barriers for our products in the developed country markets. We, the LDCs, are of course. mindful of the duty free and quota free access provided to us by several developed countries. This we appreciate very much. Nevertheless, there is much more to be done to improve market access to our products.

In this globalize world, the Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) remain still marginalized. They continue to face structural challenges to accessing world markets. In fact, the LLDCs not only face the challenge of distance but also the challenges of border crossing, both of which are rendering them extremely vulnerable. The international community is called upon to give particular attention to products originating from LLDCs, in order to help them integrate fully in the multilateral trading system.

The success of developing countries' attempts at trade liberalisation strategies would depend to a large extent on the global economic and trading processes. Economic reform strategies will see little success unless the markets of developed countries are opened to them on a competitive basis.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that there exists a mismatch between what we, the developing countries, are trying to achieve with our reform strategies and the trading processes out there in the developed world. We all know that WTO talks in Cancun last year failed mainly for this reason. This conference should address this mismatch seriously.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to conclude my statement with the hope that this conference will come up with practical proposals for improving the coherence between national strategies and global economic processes that will contribute to a successful conclusion of the stalled WTO's Doha agenda early.

Thank you