

Address by Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman

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At the Plenary Session of the

10th Ministerial Conference of the WTO

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1. It is an honor for me to participate in the Tenth Ministerial Conference of the WTO. I thank you, Madam Chairperson, the Government and the people of Kenya, for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation.
2. This Ministerial coincides with the 20th anniversary of the organization and assumes special importance being the first WTO Ministerial taking place in Africa – a continent of promise.
3. I warmly welcome the newly acceded members, Yemen, Seychelles and Kazakhstan. We also look forward to welcoming Afghanistan and Liberia to the WTO. These countries are valued friends of India and their accession to the WTO is an important affirmation of the strength of the multilateral trading system.
4. The expanding membership of the WTO, the functioning of its unique dispute settlement system, the work in its regular Committees, the progress made thus far in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), underscore the important role played by this great institution. India applauds the achievements of the WTO, and remains committed to strengthening it further.
5. The 20th anniversary of the WTO is also an occasion for introspection and to assess where we are today.
6. We have come to Nairobi with an open mind, determined to make this Conference a success for us, for Africa and for the world.

7. However, Madam Chairperson, the situation could be more encouraging. The reform process which was started after the Uruguay Round in the form of the Doha Round appears to be in jeopardy. Negotiations have spilled over into Nairobi, which makes matters very complicated. The manner and haste with which important negotiating meetings are being convened does not inspire confidence.
8. The DDA may have run into obstacles but it is in our collective interest to continue to work on all pillars, keeping its development dimension intact. We are of the firm view that this Ministerial must clearly re-affirm the Doha Development Agenda and all Ministerial Declarations and Decisions taken since 2001 when we launched the Doha Round. These are all important. Let us not waste time negotiating which of these we should reaffirm and welcome.
9. We must respect our negotiating mandates and work within the established framework of the DDA and the tried and tested WTO principles.
10. It is our duty to safeguard the legitimate interests of poor farmers and the food security of hundreds of millions in developing countries. We cannot continue with the rhetoric of a development agenda without even a reasonable attempt to address issues which are of primary concern to developing economies. For decades, a handful of farm lobbies of some countries have shaped the discourse and determined the destiny of millions of subsistence farmers of the developing countries. The reduction in the massive subsidization of the farm sector in developed countries which was the clear cut mandate of the DDA is now not even a subject matter of discussion today, leave aside serious negotiations.
11. It is in recognition of these concerns that the G-33 has strongly argued the case for an effective special safeguard mechanism for developing countries and for changing the rules relating to public stockholding for food security purposes. These are not new issues. We are disappointed at the cavalier manner in which these issues are being pushed into the future. On the other

hand, there is a sudden inexplicable zeal to harvest Export Competition. On this we are told that there is convergence when in fact, there appears to be little.

12. It is regrettable that longstanding issues of interest to a large number of developing countries are being put aside for the future and new issues of recent vintage are being taken up with unusual enthusiasm.
13. India welcomes a strong LDC package for adoption at this Ministerial but there is much more to be done to facilitate full integration of LDCs into world trade.
14. India was the first developing country to extend duty-free quota-free access to all LDCs in line with the Hong Kong ministerial mandate. Our scheme provides comprehensive coverage, including tariff lines of interest to our friends in the Cotton-4. Moreover, our scheme is underpinned by simple, transparent and liberal rules of origin. India has recently made available substantial and commercially meaningful preferences in services to LDCs.
15. We are gathered here today in Africa, a land of opportunity and promise. There is no better place to resolve that we must and shall complete the DDA. We must provide a clear political direction for the post-Nairobi work.

Agricultural reforms remain the corner stone of the DDA negotiations. We must deliver on all three pillars of the negotiations in a balanced manner. As the Hon. President of Kenya said yesterday,

Quote “the agriculture negotiations in the Doha Round are the ones from which developing countries can derive most gains.....Africa’s farmers simply cannot compete against heavily subsidized farmers in developed countries”

Unquote.

The situation is no different in most other developing countries as far as the agriculture sector is concerned.

16. Services sector is equally important for developing countries for growth as well as job creation. Besides the accelerated flow of goods, easier flow of services is, therefore, equally important. The liberalization of services trade, particularly in Modes 1 and 4, needs to figure high on the development agenda. A special initiative on Services sector is needed. To achieve this, it is imperative to put in place a simple and transparent regulatory framework that encourages growth in the Services sectors.
17. An open, non-discriminatory and inclusive multilateral trading system contributes to maximizing gains for all its Members. Plurilateral approaches by definition impinge on the multilateral trading system and cannot be a substitute for it. It is important that such arrangements complement, and not segment, the multilateral trading system.
18. I have taken careful note of calls by some members to commence work on “new issues” within the WTO. Madam Chairperson, we should resist the temptation of overloading the WTO agenda at this stage with “new issues” when we are still grappling with the completion of work in the DDA.
19. As trade Ministers, history will judge us poorly if the outcomes of the DDA perpetuate inequities in global trade. It is vital to keep the aspirations of millions of people living in the developing world in clear focus. India is prepared to constructively contribute in all areas within the framework of the negotiating mandates and the core principles of the WTO. We must act with a sense of common purpose and urgency. As we commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the WTO, let us reaffirm the DDA and resolve to conclude it in a spirit of mutual accommodation and goodwill.

Thank you.
