



**Ministerial Conference
Ninth Session
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**OPENING SESSION
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STATEMENT BY H.E. MR SHAHID BASHIR
CHAIRMAN, WTO GENERAL COUNCIL**

Thank you for the honour and opportunity to address you and to be part of this Ninth Session of the WTO Ministerial Conference.

On behalf of the WTO membership, I would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the authorities of Indonesia for undertaking the enormous task of hosting this Ministerial Conference in Bali, for their generosity and for their warm hospitality. Allow me also to say that we have been very honoured by the presence of the Honourable President of the Republic of Indonesia, whose participation at our Opening Session has testified once again to the commitment of our host country to the multilateral trading system and the values embodied in the WTO.

The venue of this Ministerial Conference is indeed propitious: it takes place in a country that, with its average annual GDP growth rate of approximately 6%, has placed trade at the heart of its development; it takes place in a country that plays a very constructive role on the international stage as a driver of integration in ASEAN, holds the chair of APEC for 2013 and is coordinator of the G-33. It seems therefore only natural that it is in this country, at this Ministerial Conference, that we are further strengthening the role of the WTO and of the multilateral trading system by delivering a number of significant results.

I have the honour to present the Reports to the Ministerial Conference from the General Council and its subsidiary bodies, covering their activities for the year 2013. Much work has been undertaken and accomplished this year, and I am proud to have had the opportunity to work with the Chairpersons of the various WTO bodies and I thank them for their hard work, determination and valuable assistance throughout the year.

I am very pleased to note that the Reports show that considerable progress has been achieved in WTO's regular work since the last Ministerial Conference. This is particularly evident with respect to the mandates that you, Honourable Ministers, gave at the Eighth Ministerial Conference, which was held in December 2011. At MC8, you adopted seven Decisions and provided further guidance for work in various areas. I am pleased to report that all the mandates that you gave have been fulfilled.

Starting with the mandate on streamlining the Accession Guidelines for Least-Developed Countries, the General Council, in July last year, adopted a Decision to strengthen, streamline, and operationalize the Guidelines. Furthermore, the TRIPS Council, in June this year, extended the transition period for LDCs under the TRIPS Agreement until 1 July 2021, in line with the mandate you gave to that Council.

In addition, the Trade Policy Review Mechanism Fifth Appraisal has been completed and the relevant report has been submitted to you by the Trade Policy Review Body.

I am also pleased to report that the General Council submitted a number of recommendations for decision to this Ministerial Conference - also directly following-up on the mandates from the Eighth Session - in the areas TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints, E-commerce, the Work Programme on Small Economies, Aid for Trade, and Trade and Transfer of Technology.

And tomorrow afternoon, you will take up the Accession of Yemen, which, once it has ratified its accession package, will bring the number of WTO Members to 160 – another sign of the continued belief and faith of the international community in the value of the multilateral trading system.

Let me also highlight here the WTO's success in addressing disputes amongst its Members through its Dispute Settlement Mechanism, which plays a vital role for enforcing trade rules. The system continues to be highly active, a sign of WTO Members' confidence in its effectiveness.

Furthermore, the Trade Policy Review Mechanism remains a cornerstone in the pursuit of transparency in trade policy and is highly appreciated by the membership, as also shown by the volume of activity in this area. A total of 20 Members were reviewed in 2013 and more are expected to be reviewed next year.

So, it is clear that this has been a period of intensive activity in the regular work of this institution. Allow me, therefore, to stress how important the regular, day-to-day business of this organization is, although it might not always be very visible or make the headlines. Regular WTO bodies oversee the implementation of existing WTO Agreements, and, I may add, of future agreements as well. They act as a forum for Members to discuss trade matters of interest to them. Their role in enhancing transparency through reporting and monitoring is essential, as is also their role in avoiding disputes. In WTO regular bodies, including the General Council, Members may raise new issues for consideration and discussion, thereby furthering the WTO agenda and making it more responsive to the new global challenges and to an ever changing trading environment. It is critical, in my view, to further strengthen the role of these bodies in the future.

As we turn to our discussions and exchanges over the next three and a half days, I wish to highlight that your statements will be invaluable in shaping the future work of this organization and in guiding your representatives in Geneva. Your statements will, of course, be in the official records of the Conference.

In closing, let me assure you that, as Chairman of the General Council, I will spare no efforts in assisting you, Mr Chairman, and the Ministers to make this Conference a success.
