

Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77 and China

São Paulo, 11 June 2004

**STATEMENT BY H.E. Mr. CELSO AMORIM
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Minister of Economic and Trade of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Mohamed bin Ahmad bin Jassim Al-Thani

Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Ambassador Rubens Ricupero,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like at the outset to welcome all Ministers and delegates from G-77 countries. It is to Brazil a very special honor to host this meeting. Ambassador Ricupero already had the opportunity to mention how the city and the state of Sao Paulo well illustrate the issues of our development agenda, but also of our cultural heritage.

It is also an honor and a pleasure in light of the clear convergence between the G-77 agenda and the agenda for foreign policy of the Brazilian government. This is clearly shown in the priority conferred to developing countries in many international initiatives undertaken by the Government of President Lula.

It is also a very special honor because many distinguished Brazilian diplomats, some of which are present here today, were deeply involved in the G-77. I would like to mention the names of three of them, although I fear I may be unjust towards many others: Ambassador Jaime de Azevedo Rodrigues, who participated at the first UNCTAD meeting; Ambassador Paulo Nogueira Batista, to whom we owe the creation of GSTP, which will also be discussed here; and Ambassador George Alvarez Maciel, who was Ambassador to the UN in Geneva for many years. We feel honored by the possibility of praising these dear colleagues here today.

I would also like to say a few words on the Ministerial Declaration resulting from a long preparatory process that brought us all to Sao Paulo. I was happy to see that the basic principles of the G-77 continue to be defended with the same strength as ever: the defense of multilateralism in the political and economic fields; the necessity to grant countries enough space to implement national policies vis-à-vis international commitments which are so often not established by ourselves; the search for more equitable rules in the international trading system; the reference to the importance of cooperation among developing countries (to be illustrated here by the launching of a new round of trade negotiations in the GSTP); and the treatment of questions of interest to a large number of countries, especially the least developed ones, such as the issue of cotton. This all shows that we continue to persevere and work united in all contexts, even those which are more difficult towards developing countries.

40 years ago, a number of developing countries from different Continents decided to associate their efforts in order to change the international system. Proud of their cultural and historical diversity and ready to rise above geopolitical constraints, these countries united their voices so as to give greater resonance to their shared aspirations.

The joint declaration which marked the birth of the Group of 77, stated that the unity of developing countries was “the outstanding feature of the entire Conference – UNCTAD, that is – and an event of historic significance”.

The initial focus was on redefining North-South relations. The inequity in the international economic order was perceived as a major obstacle to development. In the fields of trade, finance and technology, the G-77 fought against discrimination and exclusion. It also fought for more equitable rules, for making the international trading and financial systems more supportive of development efforts.

The G77 attained remarkable achievements. UNCTAD itself, now in its eleventh session, would not have been able to preserve its essential role – both as a forum for coordination and as a breeding ground for new ideas – were it not for the active support of the G77. UNCTAD and the G77 provided the intellectual and political impetus for initiatives such as the Global System of Trade Preferences – at its time, a true landmark in the recognition of the common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries.

The Group of 77 has risen in defense of increasing the efficiency, the legitimacy and the representativeness of the United Nations. During the time I served as Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, I had the opportunity to witness and fully appreciate the Group’s constructive engagement in all discussions related to the Report of the Secretary-General on “Reforming the United Nations: A Programme for Reform (A/51/950)”. No other group of nations has assumed such high stakes in making the Organization more transparent, more accountable, more efficient, more democratic.

Just as important has been the role played by the G77 in fostering South-South cooperation. In their First Ministerial Meeting, held in Algiers in 1967, the Members of the G77 stated that “the primary responsibility for their development rests on them” and that they were “determined to contribute to one another’s development”. They reaffirmed that “trade expansion and economic cooperation among themselves is an important element of a global strategy for development, and [that] they [were] therefore determined to [step] up their efforts in this respect”. In the following years, a significant number of major initiatives were undertaken.

The commitment to the expansion of trade among developing countries was reaffirmed in the Arusha Programme for Self-reliance and Programme for Negotiations in 1979, in the Caracas Programme of Action in 1981, in the Cairo Declaration on Economic Co-operation among Developing Countries in 1986.

We are commemorating the 40th anniversary of our Group. To commemorate means “to remember together”. And to remember is important, in order to prepare for the future.

When we set out to create UNCTAD, many thought that it was a hopeless dream. Reports of the imminent demise of the G77 have been proven wrong time and again. And after forty years the need for coordination among our countries is as strong as ever. We confront the same fundamental social and economic problems. We continue to share a vital interest in rendering the international system more development-friendly.

Our countries share a vision of a more democratic, cooperative and humane international system. We believe in cooperation and non-confrontation. We are ready to enhance our participation in the multilateral system on behalf of peace and development.

The preparatory process for UNCTAD XI demonstrated once more the effectiveness and importance of the G77 and China. Under the able stewardship of Ambassador Ransford Smith, from Jamaica, the Group tirelessly pursued consensus, in a serene and constructive spirit, without compromising any of its basic values and objectives.

40 years on, the gap between developed and developing countries is still present. Nowhere is it so evident than in the international trading system.

Old obstacles to growth are still with us. Trade liberalization has been uneven and barriers and distortions persist in areas of special importance to developing countries.

The Doha Development Agenda (DDA) has brought a measure of reassurance, by placing development and agriculture at the center of the multilateral negotiations at WTO. The issues concerning implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements is an essential part of the trade talks. UNCTAD can help by pinpointing areas where developing countries can reap benefits from trade liberalization and by supporting efforts of developing countries, particularly the LDCs, to fully participate in the Round.

In a few days, we will hold a Ministerial Meeting of the Global System of Trade Preferences, another brainchild of the G77. The GSTP has yet to develop its full potential. Our Representatives in Geneva have worked hard to make this mechanism a true instrument for trade generation among developing countries. I firmly believe in the value of the GSTP to foster South-South trade. In so doing, we will also strengthen our bargaining power in multilateral trade negotiations.

We have always been a diversified group. Such diversity should not be seen as a source of weakness. Rather it is a source of strength. We remain united in purpose. I could confirm this perception when I addressed – at a meeting in Georgetown, Guyana – the members of the G-90, as the coordinator of the G-20, two groups just emerged from our battles for more equitable trade disciplines at WTO.

Let us take the opportunity of this anniversary to renew the commitment of the Group of 77 and China to an international order that will be more just, inclusive and supportive of development.

Thank You.