

**Statement to be delivered by the Honourable Sabato Caesar,
Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and
Fisheries**

St. Vincent & the Grenadines

AT THE SEVENTH MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION,
2 DECEMBER 2009, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Mr Chairman

Director General

Honourable Ministers

Delegates

On behalf of the Government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I would like to congratulate the Government and people of Switzerland on hosting this Seventh WTO Ministerial Conference and for the warm hospitality they have shown to my delegation.

Mr Chairman, please allow me at the outset to highlight one of the key issues of importance to my country. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been a traditional exporter of bananas for decades. It has been a significant contributor to income, employment and growth of the country. Owing to a long and protracted dispute, including panel decisions, pronouncements have indicated that the preference that we have enjoyed is expected to effectively come to an end in the not too distant future.

Nevertheless, we along with all interested parties hope to see shortly a resolution of some sort, and a final conclusion to this long running battle. Ideally, for us, that would have meant an MFN tariff treatment that took account of my country's needs and a flexible, expeditious and efficient adjustment package to adequately meet the real needs of my country and those of my region. Although the anticipated resolution falls short of all these expectations, we are however, faced with the reality of the outcomes now on the table.

At the end of this, if we have learned one thing from this banana dispute, it is that the interests of the weak and vulnerable are not always safeguarded by the multilateral system. We hope that can be addressed. We have long insisted on a solution on this issue that is satisfactory to us, to no avail.

Mr Chairman, the Doha Development Agenda was entered into primarily to address the development deficits that were left at the end of the Uruguay Round of Negotiations. Yet, 8 years on, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is still waiting on this intent to be realised. We still stand on quite uncertain grounds as the first decade of the twenty-first century comes to a close.

Mr. Chairman, at a time when a last big impetus is needed in order to push the negotiations forward, there are signs that energies seem to be waning.

We have heard and welcomed the political reaffirmations that have been made by Ministers and Heads of Governments at various high profile political forums in London, Washington, Pittsburgh, Bali, Aquila and Singapore on the intent and desirability to conclude the DDA by 2010.

However, while the right political sentiments are being expressed, this is far removed from the reality being experienced on the ground in Geneva.

Mr. Chairman, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, along with the rest of the Caribbean Community, continues to be committed to having a fair, balanced, equitable and strong rules-based multilateral trading system that addresses the needs and concerns of all its members. Mr Chairman, such a system must contribute to sustainable economic growth and development, including poverty reduction and increased standards of living particularly for developing countries, small vulnerable economies and least developed countries. It is for this reason that we call for a satisfactory and beneficial conclusion to the Doha Round.

Mr Chairman, recalling the mandates and intent of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, we have an opportunity through a successful outcome in these negotiations to correctly realign the centre of gravity of the Multilateral Trading System from a development perspective.

In order to do that, we need to maintain or return key issues such as special and differential treatment, implementation, small economies, and aid for trade to the top of our agenda. I know that progress has been made on some of these issues such as on the work programme on small economies as manifested in the draft modalities for tariff reduction in NAMA and Agriculture. As an SVE we acknowledge and greatly welcome this progress.

It is important, however, Mr Chairman, that we preserve and build on this, and other achievements that have been gained in the negotiations thus far. This is the only way we can speedily and successfully conclude this marathon. We are therefore concerned and alarmed by what seems to be attempts at reinterpreting or changing the mandates or deviating from agreed principles and understandings.

We are also concerned Mr. Chairman that some of the fundamental principles of the system which are critically important for small countries and delegations like my own may be under threat. I speak of multilateralism, inclusiveness, and transparency. St. Vincent and the Grenadines as well as the rest of CARICOM holds dear to the principles of a bottom up approach, full participation, and consensual decision making.

Mr Chairman, as I conclude, we are fully aware and cognizant of the pragmatism of sub-multilateral processes. These are sometimes needed to move the process forward. However we must stress the primacy of multilateral engagement. There can be absolutely no substitute for this. We also do not want to see the flexibilities which have been identified for developing countries like my own being undermined within these sub-multilateral processes.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines looks forward to making its contribution to the process, as long as we are enabled to do so.

Mr Chair, I thank you.