

## Dhaka Declaration: LDCs' Proposals for WTO

The coming WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico has countries large and small working to promote their agenda for the trade negotiations that are scheduled to take place at that meeting. Recently the 49 least developed countries (LDCs) met in Dhaka, Bangladesh to establish a common negotiating position in advance of the September meeting.

After three days of meeting the LDCs agreed on a set of demands called the Dhaka Declaration that outlines their negotiating position in the Cancun trade talks. In the section on agriculture they identified ten major objectives in this round of negotiations.

Top among the objectives is a call for Developed Countries to "provide duty-free and quota-free market access to all imports from LDCs" including agricultural products in their "primary, semi-processed, and processed forms. They are calling for Developing Countries, including the United States, to "integrate such coverage into their schedule of commitments.

At this stage of the negotiations the LDCs are asking that they not have to undertake any reductions in their own protectionist measures as provided for in the Agreement on Agriculture. Their goal is to be able to develop and strengthen their own agriculture sectors before facing the competition of the world marketplace. In addition, tariffs are a significant source of income for some countries and any reduction would result in a governmental revenue shortfall.

The LDCs are calling for Developed Countries to eliminate all export subsidies. They are calling for the implementation of this measure to be put on a fast-track basis. In addition to the elimination of export subsidies, on the products of export interest to LDCs,

they are calling for the elimination of production support measures that are trade distorting. Many LDCs differ with the U.S. position, considering most farm subsidies to be trade distorting.

Some countries have used plant and animal sanitary measures to restrict imports from other countries. In that way, these countries can claim that they have opened markets while still indirectly controlling imports. The LDCs are calling for all WTO members to exercise restraints in applying sanitary measures on agricultural products from LDCs. Where sanitary measures are necessary they are asking for technical assistance to overcome such problems.

In the area of intellectual property rights they are calling for the establishment of "an international mechanism to protect the genetic resources, traditional knowledge and farmers' rights and ensure the non-patentability of all life forms."

Another item of interest is the call for developed countries to provide free access "for temporary movement of natural persons, particularly unskilled and semi-skilled service providers" by simplifying visa procedures and not requiring an Economic Needs Test.

The overall goal of the LDCs is to obtain commitments that will allow them to increase their market share in world trade.

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