



ASEAN Joint Statement

By

His Excellency Mr. Sun Suon

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Cambodia
to the United States Office, the World Trade Organization
and other International Organizations at Geneva

At

8th Working Party Meeting
on the Accession of Lao People's Democratic Republic to
the World Trade Organization

(16 March 2012, Geneva)

Mr Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of ASEAN. First of all, allow me to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening the 8th working party meeting on the Accession of Lao PDR to the WTO. My thanks and appreciations go also to the WTO Secretariat's staff for the documentation and their excellent arrangements they have prepared for our meeting.
2. I would like to warmly welcome the Lao PDR Delegation headed by His Excellency Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Commerce, to this important working party meeting. I wish to offer our sincer thanks, along with congratulation to the Honorable Minister for his opening statement highlighting the substantive progress both on bilateral and multilateral tracks, since we met last time in June 2011.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The Lao PDR has diligently continued its efforts in undertaking and concluding bilateral negotiations with WTO Members. Excellent progress has been made in these negotiations over the past 14 years, despite the resource constraints of the Lao PDR as an LDC. ASEAN notes with appreciation that to date Lao PDR has succeeded in concluding bilateral negotiations with almost all negotiating partners, including most recently with the US and the EU. Currently the Lao PDR has only outstanding bilateral negotiations with one WTO Member-Ukraine.
4. ASEAN wishes to see that consultations with Ukraine will progress smoothly in order to facilitate a speedy conclusion of negotiations. Taking into consideration the Lao PDR's status as an LDC and landlocked country with a low level of development, the spirits of 2002 LDC Accession Guidelines and in view of the recent decision made by our Ministers at MC8 to streamline the Guidelines for facilitating the accession of LDCs to the WTO, it is our earnest hope that the Government of Ukraine can show flexibility in the outstanding issues under discussion.

5. ASEAN wishes members to further note that the third revision of Lao PDR's offer on goods reveals that its overall average bound tariff rate is below 30%, with 100% binding coverage. On Services, Lao PDR has offered more than 69 services sub-sectors. The level of market access commitments is indeed a generous contribution to the multilateral trading system; and it already surpasses some of the existing WTO members' commitments. ASEAN, as an active supporter of the system, urges that the offer of Lao PDR's market access currently on the table should be acceptable by the whole membership.

Mr. Chairman,

6. ASEAN notes that since June 2011, Lao PDR has also made greater progress in the multilateral process in the efforts to bring its foreign trade regime in line with international practices and the WTO rules. These include, inter alia, the adoption of a new Custom Law, a new Intellectual Property Law and their related regulations. The adoption of other legislations and regulations related to SPS and TBT are envisaged this year. SPS and TBT Enquiry Points are being established, which will be fully operational upon accession. This progress signifies Lao PDR's serious commitment to fulfilling the requirements for the country to become a member of the WTO. ASEAN highly commends the Lao PDR for these important achievements, which will accelerate Lao PDR's regional and global economic integration process, expand trade and benefit Lao PDR and WTO members.
7. As members are well aware, domestic policy reforms requires time and sustained efforts. In this connection, ASEAN suggests that adequate transition periods should be granted to Lao PDR in difficult areas where implementation can not take place immediately after the accession. It is also important that Lao PDR be allowed to automatically access to all special and differential treatment as contained in all existing WTO agreements as they will help provide Lao PDR with the time and space needed for developing its trade and economy on a sustainable long-term basis. For our part, as fellow ASEAN members, we will also support Laos through our regional economic integration efforts in meeting these targets.

Mr. Chairman,

8. Coordinated and targeted technical assistance and capacity building are crucial to ensuring the successful completion of Lao PDR's economic reform programme. In this regard, ASEAN calls upon all partners, WTO and other related international organizations to continue providing technical and financial support to help support Lao PDR's in the pursuit of its economic reforms. ASEAN will also continue to make its active efforts in the support of Lao PDR in this regard.
9. In conclusion, ASEAN reiterates its full and continued support for the early conclusion of the accession of the Lao PDR to the WTO in 2012 as a matter of priority for this organization. The Permanent Missions of ASEAN in Geneva stand ready to work with you, Mr. Chairman, and fellow members to achieve this objective.

Thank you.