



ASEAN Joint Statement

By

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to the United States Office, the World Trade Organization  
and other International Organizations at Geneva

At

The Dedicated Session of the General Council Meeting

(26 October 2012, Geneva)

*Madame Chairperson,*

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of ASEAN. Allow me to begin by thanking you, Madame Chairperson, for convening this special session of the General Council to approve the accession package of Lao PDR to the WTO. On behalf of ASEAN, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, His Excellency Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Commerce and Industry and their delegation to the meeting and to Geneva.

*Madame Chairperson,*

2. This is a momentous occasion as the formal entry of Laos into the WTO membership will finally complete the ASEAN family within the WTO and enhance our own efforts at regional integration. Lao PDR's journey towards becoming a member of the WTO has been a long one, stretching over 15 years. The comprehensive and diligent efforts that Lao PDR has made to bring its trade regime and legislative framework into conformity with WTO requirements are highly commendable. This had been done in parallel with the domestic reforms it was undertaking to meet its commitments to ASEAN's robust economic agenda. Although Lao PDR is an LDC, the accession package is nevertheless a significant contribution to the multilateral trading system and beneficial to the WTO members. It reflects the extensive work and serious commitments undertaken by Lao PDR. These include binding tariffs at an average of 18.8% for all products and market access commitments in 10 services sectors, covering 79 sub-sectors.
3. Lao PDR's WTO membership will send an important signal to foreign investors that Lao PDR is one of their potential investment destinations in ASEAN. The adopted accession package of Lao PDR will provide foreign investors with enormous market opening on goods and services and give them confidence that they can operate their business based on predictable and transparent rules and regulations. The experience of our acceded members, namely Cambodia and Vietnam, has shown that the WTO membership is usually considered by foreign investors as one of the important factors in their investment decision making. In this regard, ASEAN believes that Lao PDR's

WTO membership will play a significant role as part of Lao PDR's overall policy to attract FDI for economic development, employment creation and poverty alleviation in the long run.

4. The accession of Lao PDR also underscores the commitment of WTO members to integrating the poorest and least developed countries into the multilateral trading system. We all know the significant challenges faced by LDCs in acceding to the WTO, and hence Members agreed on streamlining and strengthening the guidelines on LDC accessions in July this year. Lao PDR, a landlocked country of 6.5 million people, has faced those challenges and successfully tackled them with determination. Aside from the efforts made by Lao PDR, the other crucial ingredient was sincere cooperation on the part of members, to negotiate in good faith and with due consideration for the developmental needs of LDCs. We call on all members to continue demonstrating good faith in negotiating with the other LDCs in the process of accession to the WTO, in particular Yemen, so that they too can follow soon in joining the WTO as full members.
5. ASEAN would like to warmly congratulate Lao PDR for completing the final step of the accession process. Our deep appreciation also goes to all bilateral negotiating partners of Lao PDR, Amb Yi Xiaozhun of China as well as all previous chairs of the Working Party for their tireless efforts and support provided to Lao PDR. ASEAN expresses its sincere gratitude to the WTO Secretariat, donors and international agencies for their technical and financial assistance provided to Lao PDR during the accession period. ASEAN wishes to underscore that the implementation of the accession commitments will pose a great amount of challenges for Lao PDR as an LDC and therefore stresses the need to continue supporting Lao PDR to successfully implement its reform programme and WTO commitments on a sustained basis. ASEAN also stands ready to assist Lao PDR in that respect.
6. In conclusion, ASEAN looks forward to welcoming Lao PDR as the 158th member of the WTO very soon.

**Thank you**