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**Ministerial Conference
Eleventh Session
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**STATEMENT BY H.E. SUSANA MALCORRA
CHAIRPERSON OF THE ELEVENTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2017

Welcome once again to Buenos Aires.

Argentina is proud to be the first country in South America to host a WTO Ministerial Conference. This is a reflection of the importance of international trade for our country and for the entire region. We saw this yesterday with the attendance of various Presidents at the opening of the Conference. We hope that from this southern corner of the world, we can send a message that resonates far and wide.

I am especially grateful for the confidence that has been placed in me personally. I assumed the responsibility of the chairmanship with the commitment to listen to each and everybody, to make this process transparent and inclusive. In recent months I have visited many capitals and met with all the groups; this has enabled me to hear the regional perspectives and to gain an understanding of their interests and concerns. I can thus begin this shared task with a proper understanding of the areas of agreement and, above all, of the areas where there are differences.

Over the next few days, we will have a full agenda of issues to discuss and agree upon.

Our representatives have been working hard in Geneva to prepare the ground for our deliberations. Yesterday, we heard the report of the Chairman of the General Council, Ambassador Carim, about the work that has taken place in the last few months, and in a few minutes you will also hear from the Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo.

It is now up to us, the Ministers, to take up these issues and ensure that this Ministerial Conference contributes to advancing the work of the WTO and setting the direction for its future, so that the benefits of trade reach all its Members. This effort is based on the shared responsibility to work on the continuous improvement of the system and its rules.

The WTO has been fundamental in ensuring the growth and prosperity of our economies. Its rules and Agreements enshrine the core principles of openness, transparency, predictability and good governance that have shaped our trade relations for more than 20 years. Principles and rules that apply to all equally.

The most recent Ministerial Conferences have given a renewed impetus to the work of the WTO and restored trust in its decision-making function.

Today, we meet under different circumstances, at a time when international trade is often seen as a cause for concern, rather than a force for growth and inclusion.

We cannot ignore this reality. We need to deepen our understanding of the root causes of these concerns, and work towards addressing them. We have to be capable of connecting with ordinary people who, more often than not, do not understand what it is we do and why we do it.

It is therefore essential for this Ministerial Conference to strengthen the WTO's foundations, to ensure that for the next 20 years we will continue to benefit from the stability provided by the multilateral trading system and that these benefits reach all its Members. And it is all the more important that we, the WTO Ministers, come together to send a strong message about our Organization, and the positive impact it makes on the lives and prosperity of our citizens. We must be capable of generating a comprehensible and credible narrative.

The development process in our countries is multifaceted and complex. Agenda 2030, which we all approve, assigns a role to trade and to the work of the WTO as one of the engines for sustainable and inclusive growth and development. We need to ensure that the WTO has the tools to fulfil this role.

Doubtless, we may have different priorities and perspectives on specific issues. But beyond our differences, I believe that we are all united in recognizing the continued importance of the WTO to the present and future of our trade relations. This should be the focus of this Ministerial Conference.

We, in Argentina, are firmly committed to working to find common ground. As Chair, I shall do everything in my power to build the bridges that make it possible for all the parties to come closer together. This Ministerial Conference should be about preserving the system represented by the WTO.

This will require us to recommit to the WTO and to show the necessary political will to deliver a positive outcome that would put the work of the WTO on the right track to respond to the needs and aspirations of all our citizens.

The WTO, like any human construction, is perfectible and we must recognize this. But as President Macri said yesterday, "The problems of the WTO are resolved with more WTO, not with less WTO. It is time to be pragmatic and to move forward on the basis of a blueprint which, while not ideal, enables us to take small but firm steps. Today more than ever it is necessary to be aware of what is expected of each one of us and how much we can concede for the collective good."

For all these reasons I am convinced that the dialogue between Ministers, beyond the negotiating process, is more important than ever in the history of this system that we have built up collectively.

I would like to thank the Director-General, the General Council Chair and all the Chairs of regular and negotiating bodies for the work done in guiding the process thus far. I have been in regular contact with all of them in this preparatory period.

Tremendous efforts have been made to advance discussions on key issues such as agriculture, fisheries subsidies and development. Intensive discussions have taken place on some issues related to services, such as domestic regulation. Members also engaged in dynamic discussion on electronic commerce. And some initiatives and conversations among some Members have taken place on other matters, such as investment facilitation and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) - which are key components to move trade forward. Members have different perspectives about these matters. However, there is a shared recognition that this is a pivotal moment for trade, and we need to find a way to work through our differences and build on our commonalities. I stress that this our shared responsibility and we must find a way to fulfil it.

I also appreciate the tireless efforts of the General Council Chair and the positive engagement by Members to work on a draft Ministerial Declaration for this Conference, even though we heard yesterday from the Chairman that the overall circumstances and the divergences in the discussions did not allow this task to be completed in Geneva.

As Chair of the Eleventh Ministerial Conference, I am committed to carry forward all these efforts over the next few days. I will work with all of you in a manner which is open, transparent and inclusive at all times, and I assure you that I will spare no effort in helping to bridge gaps and building common ground for consensus between different Members, in order to secure a successful conclusion to this Ministerial Conference.

I am sure that, with your full support and commitment, this Ministerial Conference will establish a solid pathway for the future of the WTO and the multilateral trading system, and pave the way for results that will foster inclusive growth, development and job creation.
