

Good Morning Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am delighted to see you all here despite the fact that the workshop circus has already started in earnest, and I am sure, many of you could also have gone elsewhere this morning.

You came here although today's topic is not an easy one. "What are the Implications of the WTO Hongkong Ministerial Meeting for Sub-Saharan Africa and for Namibia?" That sounds very much like something for real specialists. And not so long ago that would have exactly been it.

But luckily with all the vibe around the WTO Ministerials in Seattle and later in Cancún, where globalization critics effectively entered the world stage and exposed some of the flaws of the negotiations that were going on there behind doors – in "green rooms" and other rooms, people began to realize that international trade negotiation directly or indirectly affects everybody. And that the people at large and different interest groups like agricultural producers, industrialists or trade unionists have to try to be on top of the issues in order to lobby their governments. And that they have to do so, despite the technical language that has developed over time in these negotiations, more to conceal than to reveal of what is going on - where words like "ambition" or "modalities" have become a very particular meaning.

This is true especially in country like Namibia, which on the whole produces what it doesn't consume and consumes what it doesn't produce, a country which therefore is very much exposed to international trade and depends to a great extent to what is agreed internationally on the terms and conditions under which goods and services can flow between the different economies in the world.

What has been noticeable not only prior to the Hongkong Ministerial Conference - which like the other Ministerial Conferences before was supposed to be a crucial event in moving forward of what is basically a free trade agenda - is the fact that public debate around Hongkong revolved more around the **threats** and not so much around the opportunities of what was to be negotiated and resolved in Hongkong.

Naively, maybe, one would have hoped that this is just the other way round. After all, the current round of negotiations within WTO the so-called Doha round, has been coined a "**Development Round**". This means that this round of negotiations - where Hongkong formed a major part of - was meant to benefit

developing nations, African countries, countries like Namibia. Among other things, the Doha mandate therefor called for 'less than full reciprocity' and 'special and differential treatment' for developing countries.

So some of the question that need to be raised this morning would be: has the Doha mandate effectively been adhered to? Who or which countries are likely to benefit from the outcome of Hongkong? With regard to trade in agriculture, industrial goods and services? What about African countries? What about Namibia? To start off, one would also have to look at what the **offensive and defensive interests** are, of African countries and Namibia in particular, their interests in terms of better access of their goods to markets, mainly in the North, but also their defensive interests in terms of protecting their own nascent or infant industries.

Things are getting even less straightforward, if we see that better access for everybody to those markets in the North, for instance in agriculture, which one might think, is a good thing, may not be a good thing for everybody. It may harm countries that currently receive preferential access for their products through bilateral or regional agreements such as AGOA or the Everything But Arms Initiative of the European Union. They would lose out, at least in the short term, if other countries, say Brazil or South Africa are going to receive similar treatment. And some of the agricultural exports from Namibia to the European Union are a case in point in that regard.

Hence, things are pretty complicated and messy, and it is our sincere hope and believe - I guess - that this morning's session and the able speakers we have invited will be in a position to disentangle for us this complicated web, and help us see the wood behind the trees.

Votes of thanks, etc...