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PERMANENT MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE
UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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SWITZERLAND

30th April 1998

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to seek your views and assistance concerning the possible attendance by President Mandela of the 50th anniversary commemoration of the establishment of the multilateral trading system based on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

As you will recall, the decision to commemorate the 50th anniversary of GATT was taken at the first Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in December 1996 in Singapore. In preparations in the WTO in Geneva over the last few months, it was decided to hold this event alongside, but distinct from, the WTO's second Ministerial Conference, beginning with the latter on 18th May and resuming on 20th May, and the 50th anniversary on 19th May 1998.

Furthermore it was agreed that participation in the 50th anniversary commemoration be at Head-of-State or Government level. This would lend the event the necessary high political profile, as well as underscore the contribution of the GATT multilateral trading system to the post-war world economy and international relations.

Latest information is that the Heads-of-State or Government of Switzerland (who will also be host to the event), Singapore, Norway, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Brazil, European Community, and Slovenia will attend this event. President Clinton of the United States, as well as the Heads-of-State or Government of Uruguay, Japan, Tunisia, Cote d'Ivoire and Thailand are reported to be seriously considering attending as well, and are expected to confirm to that effect in the next few days.

Soon after preparations for the event started, the WTO's Director-General, Renato Ruggiero, approached me to enquire about, and to urge, the participation of President Mandela in this event. At that stage, I had informed Mr Ruggiero that President Mandela would unlikely be able to attend this event, given that he was already committed to visit Geneva for the Aids Conference later this year.

Since then, as other Heads-of-State or Government have been indicating their intention to attend the event, Mr Ruggiero has again made a strong argument to me personally and separately to Minister Alec Erwin - with whom he has had contact during the latter's visits to Geneva - for President Mandela's participation in this event.

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Although we have been unable to confirm President Mandela's participation in this event, we have reassured Mr Ruggiero that South Africa - as a founding contracting party of the GATT and original member of its successor, the WTO - is committed to the multilateral trading system and to its strengthening, as well as to the meaningful integration into it of developing, least developed and in particular African countries. Indeed, this would be part of the message that President Mandela would convey were he to be able to attend the event.

Upon further reflection over this matter, and after my discussion with Minister Erwin, it is our opinion that the 50th anniversary event presents an opportunity that we should take advantage of for President Mandela to make a high level foreign policy intervention in the multilateral trading system on behalf of the South Africa, the African continent and the developing world.

In recent years, significant steps have been taken to place South Africa in a leadership position on the global multilateral stage, including in the trade and development arena, such as, for example, our hosting of the UNCTAD IX Conference in 1996. We believe that President Mandela's attendance of this event would strengthen the leadership role that South Africa is cultivating, as well as raise the profile of African and other developing countries' concerns in the WTO. It would also provide South Africa with an unique high level opportunity to further promote the message of an African Renaissance that our leaders have been articulating as part of our foreign policy towards Africa.

Increased participation in the multilateral trading system has been one of the key avenues African countries have taken in their pursuit of economic recovery and development. Despite modest growth in recent years, the African continent remains peripheral to, and indeed faces marginalization from, the phenomenal growth that has accompanied the globalization of the world economy.

At UNCTAD IX, we succeeded in making the challenge of the African economic condition a central theme of the conference. In contrast, the WTO, as one the key levers of the international community in the economic sphere, and the preeminent global trade promotion agency, has yet to rise up to the challenge of the African economic condition in any meaningful way. South Africa, in the person of President Mandela, can help place the African challenge squarely in the court of the WTO at the highest possible political level, as would be presented by the 50th anniversary event.

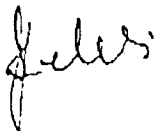
Moreover, since none of the African Heads-of-State or Government has yet confirmed their participation, there is the concerning prospect that Africa will not have high-level representation at what is expected to be a high-profile summit event.

Given the above, therefore, I respectfully ask you to personally take up this matter with President Mandela with a view to securing his attendance at this important international event.

I need not stress the urgency of this matter in light of the event being just three weeks away and of the vast logistical and other preparations that would need to be promptly made if President Mandela will attend the event, which I hope would be the case.

I trust that you will agree with the motivation presented above for President Mandela's participation in the 50th anniversary commemoration of the multilateral trading system and look forward to your urgent response.

Your sincerely



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