

Remarks of Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky  
Closing Plenary

December 3, 1999

Let me begin by offering my sincere thanks to Director-General Moore, to our Working Group Chairs and Co-Chairs, the WTO Secretariat, and to each of the delegations representing their governments here at this Ministerial, for their very hard and productive work over the past week. I would also like to thank our hosts in the Seattle community for their hospitality and patience during a sometimes very difficult week.

Over the past four days, we engaged in intense discussion and negotiations on one of the core questions facing the world today: the creation of a global trading economy for the next century. The delegates have taken up some of the most profound and important issues and policy decisions imaginable, including issues that previous Rounds could not resolve, and matters that have not come before the trading system in the past. They took up these issues with good will and mutual respect, and made progress on many of them.

However, the issues before us are diverse, complex and often novel. And together with this, we found that the WTO has outgrown the processes appropriate to an earlier time. An increasing and necessary view, generally shared among the members, was that we needed a process which had a greater degree of internal transparency and inclusion to accommodate a larger and more diverse membership.

This is a very difficult combination to manage. It stretched both the substantive and procedural capacity of the Ministerial, and we found as time passed that divergences of opinion remained that would not be overcome rapidly. Our collective judgment, shared by the Director-General, the Working Group Chairs and Co-Chairs, and the membership generally, was that it would be best to take a time out, consult with one another, and find creative means to finish the job.

Therefore, Ministers have agreed to suspend the work of the Ministerial. During this time, the Director-General can consult with delegations and discuss creative ways in which we might bridge the remaining areas in which consensus does not yet exist, develop an improved process which is both efficient and fully inclusive, and prepare the way for successful conclusion. The Ministerial will then resume its work.

Again, I wish to thank Director-General Moore, the Seattle community, and all our delegations for their hard work and their participation in these talks. Our work together has been an honor and a privilege for me, and I look forward to its continuation in the weeks and months ahead.