

Opening Statement

by

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The UNCTAD secretariat is proud to welcome you here in Geneva to the second meeting of the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture. The Task Force is the brainchild of three organizations FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD that bring different perspectives and backgrounds to the deliberations of the Task Force, but pursue a common goal: the reduction of technical barriers to international trade in organic produce, in particular for exports from developing countries. The Task Force is a very good example for a pro-active and hands-on partnership between UN organizations and civil society.

Based on recommendations of two UNCTAD Expert Meetings, the 7th session of UNCTAD's Commission on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities in February this year gave a mandate to the UNCTAD secretariat to create and facilitate the work of this Task Force.

Being a knowledge-based and brainstorming institution on analyzing and optimizing the contribution of international trade to sustainable development, UNCTAD puts the work of this Task Force in the following context:

First, the current round of global trade liberalization negotiations following the Doha Ministerial Declaration of the WTO includes the reduction or elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services as explicit negotiating issue. Organic produce is one of the groups of products that might be considered in these negotiations, although many WTO members have articulated reservations because of generic issues on process and production methods. The Doha Declaration also asks the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment to pay particular attention in further analysis and discussions to the effect of environmental measures on market access. UNCTAD is very much involved in conceptual work and discussions on these two issues. Recently, UNCTAD held an Expert Meeting on Environmental Goods and Services. UNCTAD is also assisting a number of developing countries in identifying environmentally friendly goods. Furthermore, UNCTAD is conducting exploratory activities for setting up a Consultative Task Force on Environmental Requirements and International Trade.

Second, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development calls on countries to "support voluntary, WTO compatible, market-based initiatives for the creation and expansion of domestic and international markets for environmentally friendly goods and services, including organic products, which maximize environmental and developmental benefits..., paragraph 93 (b). The work of this Task Force can make an important contribution to release breaks that slow the flow of exports of organic products, notably from developing countries.

Third, in mid-June 2004, UNCTAD will have its eleventh conference in Sao Paulo. In the run-up to the conference, the International Trade Division of the secretariat will pay particular attention to initiatives that enhance developing countries' participation in and benefits from new and dynamic growth opportunities in world trade. The work of this Task Force will be highly appreciated in this context and will get our full support.

Finally, although product and process standards are increasingly important as effective tools in the international competitiveness race, may I remind all of us that the subject of this Task Force is a real win-win-win proposition, i.e. a win for trade, a win for development and a win for environment. I sincerely hope that this does not remain a slogan but that this group can breath life into more harmonization and equivalence in production and trade of organic products to the benefit of producers and consumers alike.