Mr Chairman

I have the honour today to speak on behalf of the Cairns Group of 19 agricultural exporting countries, namely, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay.

Agriculture trade reform is unfinished business. At the last Cairns Group Ministerial Meeting, our Ministers discussed the international trade policy environment, including the Doha Round agriculture negotiations, our shared desire to continue agricultural trade policy reform efforts, the development dimension to agriculture reform and food security, in accordance with the Doha mandate.

Mr Chairman

From the Cairns Group’s perspective it is critical that we re-engage in a meaningful way on agriculture. We have pointed on many occasions to the importance of agriculture for development - in many developing countries a significant proportion of the population is still largely dependent upon agriculture as a source of income. The Cairns Group wishes to address the global imbalances and distortions in world agricultural trade whether these be in areas of market access, domestic support or export subsidies.
It is important we address these distortions not only in terms of creating further market efficiencies and more effective price signals for farmers and investors in agriculture alike but also as a means of contributing to greater food security.

We are all familiar with the statistics - the FAO estimates that the global population will increase to 9 billion by 2050 and as a consequence agricultural production will need to increase by 70 per cent. This increase must be achieved sustainably, in a context of growing economic, environmental and social pressures.

The growth in food production to meet this demand will not necessarily occur in the same places where the population is projected to grow. That is why trade will play a critical role in addressing the nutritional needs of these populations. More investments in agriculture is needed including, where food insecurity challenges are prevalent.

We have pursued reforms through the Doha agriculture negotiations so vigorously because, amongst other things, we recognise that trade policy reform is crucial in addressing food security. In a world grappling with such vital issues, it concerns us that the distortions and imbalances in agriculture continue to be so much greater than those for industrial goods.

We are approaching another WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali in December and Cairns Group Members have registered in Geneva that agriculture issues must be a part of the “Bali Package.”
While we understand that the economic environment remains uncertain one thing is clear, volatility is a factor which is always present in agriculture – farmers deal with uncertainties climatic and man-made alike. Through our continuing efforts to reform policies we are looking to address volatility, where possible, through creating more stable and predictable markets.

The Bali Ministerial Meeting will be an important one for the World Trade Organisation. The international community and Members of the Cairns Group in particular will want the WTO to deliver concretely in terms of our desire to see agriculture trade reform progress in a way which takes into account the development goals of all Members, but particularly the most vulnerable.

Therefore we strongly encourage relevant Members to engage constructively on the three agriculture issues under discussion in Geneva – on export competition, in tariff rate quota administration and on public stockholding for food security, with a view to achieving tangible results at the 9th Ministerial Conference in Bali.

In this regard, we also thank the Director General of the WTO and the Chair of the Agriculture negotiations in Geneva for the invigoration of the negotiating process and encourage them to continue their efforts.

Thank you