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DOMINICA

Dominica protests Ecuador's WTO bid

By Ellsworth Carter

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ROSEAU, Dominica - Dominica's top trade official is urging the World Trade Organization to reject Ecuador's bid to ease tariffs on its bananas shipped to Europe, arguing such a move would squeeze small island producers out of the market.

Ecuador, the world's largest banana producer, filed a protest against the European Union's banana import rules system two weeks ago, arguing it unfairly restricts its access to EU market.

A reduction of tariffs for Ecuador would send "a clear message that small countries that now trade in the world will have no place in any new world trade order," said Charles Savarin, Dominica's foreign affairs and trade minister, late Tuesday.

Latin American producers and banana firms based in the United States have long complained that EU rules favor Caribbean and African producers. Latin American bananas hold around 60 percent of the market, while African and Caribbean producers have 20 percent, EU officials have said.

Savarin said it was critical that the EU maintain duty-free treatment of a banana quota from Africa and the Caribbean.

Dominica, a mountainous island in the eastern Caribbean, depends primarily on banana exports and tourism to sustain its economy.

Last year the EU formally proposed an overhaul of its import program after the WTO ruled its previous system of tariffs and quotas was illegal.