

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Negotiating Group on Maritime Transport Services

NOTE ON THE MEETING OF 4 JUNE 1996

The thirteenth meeting of the Negotiating Group on Maritime Transport Services took place at high level on 4 June 1996. The agenda of the meeting was contained in Airgram WTO/AIR/342 of 14 May 1996.

The meeting centred on the submission of a package of draft offers by twenty-four participants. The package was conditional on a matching, comprehensive offer from the United States, and would expire on 14 June. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the European Communities, the Dominican Republic, Hong Kong, Iceland, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Singapore, South Africa and Switzerland said that the package contained substantial improvements by several countries on all three pillars and, in a number of cases, introduced commitments on multimodal transport. They believed that it represented a significant step towards achieving a liberalizing outcome in the negotiations. Egypt, Thailand and Turkey expressed support for the package and indicated that they would also soon submit conditional offers. Tunisia said that it had begun a process of trade liberalization but had not yet submitted an offer. Participants expressed deep disappointment at the absence of an offer from the United States and urged it strongly to submit one. Canada suggested that perhaps the time had come to consider alternatives not contingent upon US participation. Hong Kong said that the absence of one or two participants would not spell doom for the negotiations or the GATS, and urged participants who had constructively engaged thus far to stay the course and harvest the offers at the end of these negotiations.

The United States agreed to examine the package carefully, but it said that a preliminary review (during the course of the meeting) had revealed little more than repackaged offers. In particular, only four participants had included the possibility of commercial presence in the crucial area of multimodal transport and most offers did not contain rollback. As such, there was little reason to expect a US offer, and Canada's suggestion, to consider other options, was a useful one. The Chairman supported the view of many delegations that the United States should carefully consider the package of offers, which had been made possible through a great effort on the part of many participants. He asked the United States also to take into consideration the other offers that had been promised.

The Chairman said that the NGMTS would meet next on 17 June 1996 after a period of reflection.