1. On 8 April 1956 the Executive Secretary addressed a letter to the contracting parties in which he suggested that as a regular procedure, beginning with the Eleventh Session, the first few days of the annual sessions should be devoted to an exchange of views at ministerial level.

2. This question was further discussed in the Intersessional Committee at its meetings in September and October 1956 and thereafter at the Eleventh Session itself (IC/SR.27 and 28, SR.11/17). The Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES drew the conclusion from the discussion that in principle it would be advantageous if Trade Ministers were to attend sessions of the CONTRACTING PARTIES and that such meetings should be held early in the Session. The Intersessional Committee was instructed to arrange for a meeting of Ministers at the Twelfth Session and establish a suitable agenda for discussion by Ministers.

Twelfth Session, October 1957

3. The Intersessional Committee discussed the Ministerial Meeting at its meetings in August and September 1957 and decided on the timing and the proposed agenda for the Meeting (IC/SR.33, 34).

4. The Twelfth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES was held from 17 October to 30 November 1957, the Ministerial Meeting was held from 26-30 October and was chaired by the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES (SR.12/7-10).

5. The agenda for the Ministerial Meeting was as follows:

(i) Progress in the expansion of international trade (reference "International Trade, 1956");

(ii) Prospects for achieving further progress in the expansion of trade through international co-operation, particularly through GATT;

(iii) Consideration of the principal items on the Twelfth Session agenda, such as the European Common Market, trends in commodity trade and machinery for international trade co-operation.
6. Statements were made by thirty-two Ministers or representatives of the contracting parties.

7. In concluding the Ministerial Meeting the Chairman pointed to the advantages of having such meetings on a regular basis, and stated that advance preparations should be made by the Intersessional Committee. In summing up he referred to some of the major issues of international trade that had emerged from the discussions including the question of the relationship of the Treaty of Rome, which had just been signed, and the GATT. At the end of the Ministerial Meeting a Committee was set up to examine the Rome Treaty.

8. Furthermore, the directives given by the Ministers led to the establishment of a Panel of Expert Economists to make an objective study of certain trends in international trade.

Thirteenth Session, October 1958

9. At its meeting in September 1958 the Intersessional Committee discussed the question of whether a meeting of Trade Ministers should be held during the Thirteenth Session. The Committee decided on the dates for the meeting at ministerial level, the holding of which would be conditional on a representative attendance of Ministers, numerically and geographically. The Committee also decided on the agenda, proposed by the Executive Secretary, to be recommended to the Ministers (IC/SR.41).

10. The Thirteenth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES was held from 16 October to 22 November 1958. During the opening days, from 16-18 October, a number of Ministers attended. The ministerial discussion was chaired by the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES (SR.13/1-5).

11. The agenda recommended by the Intersessional Committee (IC/SR.41) was as follows:

I. Trends in International Trade

   For this topic the background documents would be the experts' report. This discussion would afford Ministers the opportunity of commenting upon the major problems dealt with in the report, viz. the conditions of trade in agricultural products, commodity problems, and special problems affecting the trade of the less-developed countries.

   II. Future Activities of the Contracting Parties directed towards the Continued Expansion of International Trade

   In this connexion Ministers might like to examine:
A. Action directed towards further tariff reduction.

B. Action directed towards the elimination of quantitative restrictions, and in particular of the remaining elements of discrimination. Here, Ministers might like to lay down directives or guiding lines for the conduct of the consultations which will take place in 1959.

C. Other international measures directed towards the expansion of world trade, including the harmonization of regional and broader programmes.

D. Means of improving the effectiveness of the General Agreement in contributing towards its objectives.

12. Statements were made by twenty-four Ministers or representatives of the contracting parties.

13. The three major points drawn from the Ministerial discussion were the proposal for a fresh round of negotiations to reduce tariff levels, the problems arising out of the widespread use of protective measures under national agricultural policies and the question of obstacles to the expansion of the export trade of under-developed countries. Subsequently, the CONTRACTING PARTIES agreed on the initiation of a co-ordinated programme of action relating to these three principal topics and established three Committees to lay down the action to be taken for the carrying out of the co-ordinated programme (W.13/39; SR.13/17).

Fifteenth Session, October 1959

14. At the Fourteenth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, held in May 1959, the Chairman invited delegations to consider whether the CONTRACTING PARTIES should arrange for a meeting of Trade Ministers to be held during the Fifteenth Session in Tokyo. The CONTRACTING PARTIES discussed the agenda and decided that there should be a meeting of Ministers at the Fifteenth Session (SR.14/8, 10).

15. The Fifteenth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES was held in Tokyo from 26 October to 20 November 1959. The Ministerial Meeting was held from 27-29 October and was chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan (SR.15/2-6).

16. The agenda for the Ministerial Meeting, prepared during the Fourteenth Session (SR.14/10) was as follows:
1. Current trends in international trade (the discussions to be based upon International Trade 1957/58 and perspectives for international trade and commercial policy in the light of the restoration of external convertibility in the currencies of a number of contracting parties and of the fiscal and exchange reforms undertaken in others).

2. Progress in the implementation of the programme for trade expansion.

3. Programmes for economic integration through trade liberalization on a regional basis and harmonization of these programmes with the world-wide objectives of the GATT.

4. Consideration of the principal items on the agenda for the session.

17. Statements were made by thirty-six Ministers or representatives of the contracting parties. In his summing up the Chairman referred, inter alia, to the importance of pressing on with the GATT programme of trade expansion, initiated at the Thirteenth Session.

Nineteenth Session, 27-30 November 1961

18. At its meeting in March 1961 (C/M/5) the Council agreed to recommend to the CONTRACTING PARTIES that a Ministerial Meeting be held in the autumn of 1961, at or about the time of the Nineteenth Session.

19. The recommendation was submitted to contracting parties by postal ballot. A large majority responded in favour of the holding of such a meeting. The Council considered this question further at its meeting in May 1961 (C/M/6) and made specific recommendations as to the timing of the Meeting of Ministers and as to the main problems of international trade, which had been identified by the CONTRACTING PARTIES, and to which Ministers would be invited to address themselves. The Council also recommended that contracting parties be invited to submit suggestions as to specific points which might be considered by Ministers. At their Spring Session in May 1961 the CONTRACTING PARTIES approved the Council's recommendations (SR.18/4). In October 1961 (C/M/8) the Council drew up the draft agenda to be proposed to the Ministers as follows:

A. Reduction of tariff barriers to trade

B. Trade in agricultural products

C. Obstacles to trade of less-developed countries.
In addition, specific points for discussion had been proposed by individual delegations:

- the future work of Committee II (New Zealand)
- duty-free entry for tropical products (Nigeria)
- prompt fulfilment of GATT obligations (Uruguay).

20. The Nineteenth Session was held from 13 November to 9 December 1961. The session was interrupted for the duration of the ministerial meeting from 27-30 November 1961. The ministerial meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

21. Present were forty-five Ministers or ministerial representatives of contracting parties and four Ministers from observer countries.

22. The Conclusions of the Meeting of Ministers adopted on 30 November 1961 are contained in the BISD 10S/25. The Ministers agreed on guidelines on the three main topics, which they forwarded to the CONTRACTING PARTIES; the Ministers adopted a Declaration on promotion of trade of less-developed countries, which also was communicated to the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

23. On 7 December 1961 the CONTRACTING PARTIES made the appropriate decisions for the implementation of the Conclusions of Ministers (BISD 10S/32) and adopted the Declaration on the Promotion of Trade of Less-Developed Countries (BISD 10S/28).

Ministerial Meeting, 16-21 May 1963

24. At their Twentieth Session in November 1962 the CONTRACTING PARTIES considered a proposal made jointly by the United States and Canada for the convening of a Meeting of Ministers early in 1963 (L/1891, SR.20/10). The proposal mentioned the recently enacted US Trade Expansion Act and referred to the desirability of having a Tariff Conference to begin in 1964. The proposal also referred to the questions of trade in agriculture, trade in tropical products and the needs of the less-developed countries.

25. The CONTRACTING PARTIES agreed that a Ministerial Meeting should be held at a date to be determined by the Council. The Council should also propose an agenda and make adequate preparations for the meeting.

26. The Council at its meeting of 19-21 February 1963 (C/M/14) initiated the preparatory work for the Meeting of Ministers and agreed to recommend that the Meeting of Ministers should give directions for the effective liberalization and expansion of trade in both primary and secondary products and should consider, inter alia:
A. Arrangements for the reduction or elimination of tariffs and other barriers to trade, and related matters;

B. Measures for access to markets for agricultural and other primary products;

C. Measures for the expansion of the trade of developing countries as a means of furthering their economic development.

Extensive preparatory work was carried out by the Working Party on Procedures for Tariff Reduction, the Special Group on Trade in Tropical Products, and Committee III of the Trade Expansion Programme. The reports of these three groups were considered by the Council at its meeting of 25 April-1 May 1963 (C/M/15).

27. The agenda proposed by the Council also contained a number of specific points of the Action Programme submitted by less-developed countries on measures for the expansion of trade of developing countries.

28. The Meeting of Ministers was held from 16-21 May 1963. The meeting was attended by fifty-four Ministers or ministerial representatives of the contracting parties and by twenty-five representatives, including two ministerial representatives, of observer countries.

29. The text of the Conclusions and Resolutions adopted on 21 May 1963 is contained in the BISD 12S/36. The Conclusions relate to the Programme of Action sponsored by developing countries, to trade in tropical products, to the establishment of an Action Committee, to arrangements for the reduction of tariffs and measures for access to markets for agricultural products, including the establishment of a Trade Negotiations Committee.

Meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee at Ministerial Level, 4-6 May 1964

30. In order to mark the formal opening of the trade negotiations the TNC agreed in April 1964 (TN.64/SR.4) that the Committee would have a meeting at ministerial level from 4-6 May 1964.


Twenty-Fourth Session, November 1967

32. In August 1967 the Director-General addressed an airgram to all contracting parties in which he stated that it would seem most appropriate that Trade Ministers should again meet briefly during the twenty-fourth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to survey the principal trade problems
still requiring further international consultation following the conclusion of the Kennedy Round, and in the light of this survey to lay down policy guidelines for the future work of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

33. Several contracting parties responded favourably to the Director-General's suggestion.

34. The Session was held from 9-24 November 1967. The last three days of the session were devoted to a review of the work of the CONTRACTING PARTIES through the last two decades and to consideration of the programme for the future. No specific preparatory work was carried out. The session was attended by twenty Ministers or ministerial representatives of the contracting parties and forty-seven representatives of the contracting parties. Seventeen governments were represented by observers.

Ministerial Meeting, Tokyo, September 1973

35. At their Twenty-Eighth session the CONTRACTING PARTIES reaffirmed their intention to initiate multilateral trade negotiations in 1973 in the framework of GATT. It was agreed that in preparation for the negotiations a Preparatory Committee should be established, its membership to be open to all contracting parties and developing countries not contracting parties wishing to participate in the preparatory work (BISD 19S/12). The Preparatory Committee met during the first half of 1973 and submitted a report and a draft declaration to the Ministerial Meeting.

36. The Ministerial Meeting was held from 12-14 September 1973. It was chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. Ministers or ministerial representatives of seventy-one contracting parties and of thirty-one developing countries non-contracting parties attended the meeting. The Ministers adopted the Tokyo Declaration which served as the formal beginning of the multilateral trade negotiations (BISD 20S/19).

Conclusion

37. So far, eight ministerial meetings have been held. The first four meetings in 1957, 1958, 1959 and 1961 and the meeting in 1967 were held as part of or in connexion with the annual sessions of the CONTRACTING PARTIES. The three meetings in 1963, 1964 and 1973 were held separately. The preparatory work was carried out by the Intersessional Committee and the Council, but more specific questions, such as those relating to tariff reduction, tropical products, trade with developing countries, access to markets for agricultural products, etc., were prepared in existing bodies. At all meetings observers to sessions of the CONTRACTING PARTIES were invited, with the exception of the 1964 meeting, which was a meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee at ministerial level. For the Tokyo meeting, invitations were also addressed to those developing countries not contracting parties, which so far had not requested observer status with the CONTRACTING PARTIES. Especially in 1963 and in 1973 a great number of non-contracting parties were represented by observers, sometimes at ministerial level.