GATT MARKS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) today marks its 30th anniversary.

The original text of the GATT was signed on 30 October 1947 in the Salle du Conseil of the Palais des Nations, Geneva. It entered into force on 1 January 1948.

A ceremony in Geneva today will mark both the thirtieth anniversary of GATT and the inauguration of its new headquarters in the Centre William Rappard on the north shore of the lake. Speakers at the ceremony will be Mr. Ernst Brugger, Swiss Federal Councillor and head of the Department of Public Economy, Mr. Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Henri Schmitt, President of the Conseil d'Etat of Geneva, Mr. Olivier Long, Director-General of GATT, and Mr. George Alvares Maciel, Chairman of the Contracting Parties to GATT.

The 23 countries¹ which drew up the GATT in 1947 had been engaged in drafting a charter for a proposed International Trade Organization (ITO) which would have been a United Nations specialized agency.

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¹Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Chile, China*, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, France, India, Lebanon*, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Southern Rhodesia, Syria*, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States.

(*These three countries subsequently withdrew from the GATT).
The General Agreement, based largely on selected parts of the draft ITO charter, was concluded in order to get trade liberalization under way quickly and was provided with only minimum institutional arrangements because it was expected that responsibility for it would soon be assumed by the ITO. However, plans for the ITO had to be abandoned when it became clear that its charter would not be ratified, and the General Agreement was left as the only international instrument laying down rules accepted by nations responsible for most of the world's trade. Thus it became a permanent feature of international economic life over the next 30 years.

During that period the membership of GATT expanded to its present total of 83 countries, while a further 28 nations apply its rules in practice.

To cope with the demands of expanding membership, new challenges to and opportunities for the liberalization of international trade, the GATT secretariat has also grown. Initially it consisted of half a dozen officials and a few secretaries operating out of a converted aircraft factory at Lake Success on Long Island, New York State, then the headquarters of the fledgling United Nations.

In 1948 this small group moved to the Palais des Nations in Geneva, and from that time GATT has been identified with Geneva.

In 1952 the secretariat moved to the Villa Le Chêne, today part of Geneva's botanical gardens. Another four years later, in 1956, it moved to the Villa Le Bocage, rented from the United Nations, where two annexes were built in 1961 and 1965. Since 1968 the secretariat has occupied the Villa La Fenêtre, next to the Bocage, again as a tenant of the United Nations.

The secretariat, now numbering about 200 people, moved to the Centre William Rappard during the summer of this year, so as to put all GATT activities under one roof, and to provide it, for the first time, with its own conference facilities. The Centre, the former headquarters of the International Labour Organisation, has been extensively modernized during the past two years by the Swiss authorities and GATT itself. GATT occupies the north portion of the building, which includes seven conference rooms (five equipped for simultaneous interpretation) that will be in heavy use in the coming months for the current Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations.