We have now come to the end of our labours at this Tenth Session of the Contracting Parties to the GATT. It has been a fruitful session but at the same time an onerous one for most of the delegations. Besides a series of twenty-two plenary meetings, we have had to set up twelve Working Parties to give detailed examination to many of the questions under review. The documentation at this session has been more voluminous than at any previous regular session of the Contracting Parties. This has meant fairly continuous application and a great deal of hard work for the members of delegations over the past five weeks. As your Chairman, I am most grateful for the cooperation I have received from the representatives which has enabled us to get through our heavy agenda as expeditiously as the importance of the subject matter justified in each case. This session has been markedly free of a wasting of time through needlessly long discussions on points of less than major importance. Delegates have spoken on the question at issue at the time of the debate with the result that the main issues at stake have become clear. This has not only facilitated the task of the Chairman in summing up, but has also led to a generally satisfactory solution being found earlier than would have otherwise been the case. Gentlemen, I thank you for this excellent spirit of cooperation, which has become such a notable characteristic of the Contracting Parties.

When I look back over the past five weeks I cannot help but feel proud and satisfied with the scope and complexity of the tasks achieved. Is there, I wonder, any other intergovernmental operation today which undertakes — with a remarkable economy of manpower — so many intricate negotiations within so short a space of time, some of them leading to decisions involving matters of policy at a very high level. I remember remarking at the end of the meeting in Geneva in 1947 which drafted the General Agreement that I wondered if the delegates really knew what they had done. Today we can, I think, usefully reflect on what we have done and on what our work has contributed towards our main objectives of reducing barriers to trade.

Of outstanding significance is the decision to adopt a programme whereby a very important trading country, namely Belgium, will eliminate the last vestiges of its import restrictions, namely those imposed on agricultural products, within seven years. This is a big step forward towards the achieving of the basic philosophy of the General Agreement, as laid down in Article XI, namely that member countries will eliminate quantitative restrictions on imports when no longer justified for balance of payments reasons. The decision is all the more significant and encouraging when one realises that it applies to a list of agricultural products — a sector of trade which is notoriously difficult to free from quantitative import restrictions, especially in countries enjoying a high degree of economic development. It also shows how wise we were in the Review of the Agreement last winter to lay down a set of firm rules to meet cases of this kind. (MORE)
A second notable contribution which this session has made towards achieving the basic objectives of the Agreement has been the completion of arrangements for the tariff conference which will open at Geneva on 18 January. While it was not possible to meet the desires of certain countries which felt that the old techniques of tariff negotiation could be improved, I think that an element of flexibility has been introduced which should go some way towards meeting their wishes. Tariff reduction and the maintenance of tariff stability over a wide sector of the world's trade has been one of the lasting achievements of the Contracting Parties and it is good to know that governments are willing to enter into a fourth series of negotiations designed to reduce import tariffs, and particularly those high tariffs which are such a menace to trade. The opportunity for holding the negotiating conference early next year arose from the powers for tariff reduction recently given to the President of the United States. But this conference will not in any sense be simply a series of bilateral negotiations with the United States. It is a multilateral negotiation in which many of the twenty-six participating countries will negotiate with each other.

When we came to this session we all realized that we faced a most awkward and embarrassing situation due to the fact that fourteen governments had invoked Article XXXV in relation to the accession of Japan. It is a matter of regret that we have not found it possible at this stage to discover a satisfactory way out of this dilemma. What is important, however, is that the Contracting Parties have recognized the gravity of the present situation. There have been fruitful discussions both in Plenary Session and in bilateral talks. I think we now recognize the nature of the problem, in its various aspects, better than we did six weeks ago. The decision to keep the matter under constant review is, I am sure, the right one, and if I may add a personal view, I think the prospects for an improvement in the situation in the not too distant future are good. I think, too, we all recognize the exemplary behaviour of the Japanese delegation in a situation of extreme difficulty and the thoughtful, constructive efforts they have made to find a solution.

Another matter of concern, which should be stressed, is the situation we face - and let us face it frankly - in regard to the establishment of the Organization for Trade Cooperation. Today we do not need to blow a loud blast on the trumpet to show that the GATT is playing a vital, essential rôle in the economic affairs of the world. No better evidence of this can be cited than the steps taken to modernize the Agreement which was undertaken last winter and the decision to submit to governments an agreement which when accepted by all the leading trading nations would replace the Contracting Parties, acting jointly, with the Organization for Trade Cooperation. It is now clear that everything depends on the course which one contracting party will follow next year. If the result is negative or if it is delayed indefinitely, I have little doubt that the rest of the world will be confused and dismayed. And in such circumstances one cannot rule out a degree of encouragement to those who would prefer something other than a global system of trade regulations such as that embodied in our Agreement.

At the beginning of the session we had on our agenda eleven complaints concerning breaches of obligations under the Agreement. Many of these were settled behind the scenes through bilateral talks and others have been put forward for the next session in case they are not settled before that date.
For the first time since it was established the Panel of Complaints has not been called upon to deal with a single case. Surely this is a remarkable tribute to the GATT system as a whole and encouraging evidence that on an increasing scale member governments are doing their best to avoid taking action that is contrary to the terms of the Agreement and that, if they fail to live up to its obligations they are most anxious to put the matter right without bringing it before the Contracting Parties.

During this session we have achieved a marked improvement in our method of consultation on balance of payments restrictions. We can look forward to these consultations becoming of increasing value in the future. This is a development which is not without significance to international trade. In this work we have been materially assisted by the cooperation we have received from the International Monetary Fund and we are grateful to the Fund for having made available members of their staff to assist us in the consultations that have taken place at this session.

Our annual meetings, I find, often act as a mirror - or perhaps rather as a sounding board - for matters which are currently of major economic and political concern to the member governments. This has been the case at this session in respect of surplus agricultural products and the problem of disposing of such surpluses. This discussion showed that this problem, which was debated at great length last winter in the review session, remains a subject of serious and continuing importance to many contracting parties and it is not surprising that the Contracting Parties have decided that the matters arising out of the terms of the Resolution on the Disposal of Surpluses should again be put on the agenda for the next Session.

I should like also to say a word about the decision to establish the trainee scheme. The Contracting Parties at the Ninth Session showed their concern and sympathy with the efforts of the less developed countries to strengthen and diversify their economies. The adoption of the trainee scheme - although at present rather modest in scope - is further proof of the will of the Contracting Parties to make a positive contribution to the solution of these problems.

We can also take satisfaction from the fact that the negotiations sponsored by the Contracting Parties working towards the drafting of a separate agreement on commodity problems have made progress at this session and that arrangements have been made for bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion at the next session.

There is another matter on which a favourable comment is not out of place. I wonder how many other intergovernmental agencies can show such a satisfactory record of prompt financial contributions from their members as the General Agreement. I am sure this acts as a stimulant both towards the efficiency with which we do our work, and towards good housekeeping by the Executive Secretary and his staff.

I cannot conclude without recording once more an appreciation of the admirable work done by Mr. Wyndham White, the Executive Secretary, and his small band of helpers. It is a source of wonderment to other international organizations with large staffs how we can function so smoothly and turn out documents of such high quality when we have a total staff which represents only a small percentage of the staffs which they have at their disposal. We thank the Executive Secretary and each and every member of the Secretariat for their able and efficient help.
We are also grateful to the United Nations for the use of the conference rooms and office space in the Palais des Nations and for their excellent services in connection with the distribution of documents.

Finally, a word about our hard-worked interpreters. Without them we could not function. We thank them for the efficient services they have rendered.

In declaring closed the Tenth Session of the Contracting Parties I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.