The Italian Government has willingly accepted to participate in this fourth round of tariff negotiations, being convinced that further progress towards the reduction of tariff barriers would contribute substantially to international economic co-operation.

This attitude is in full conformity with the policy that Italy has constantly followed in the last few years in respect of trade and tariff matters, not only by eliminating quantitative import restrictions towards a considerable part of the world, but also by lowering unilaterally the level of its tariffs.

While it is true that this effort was achieved at the end of 1951, that is, at a time when Italy had a favourable balance of payments within EPU, it is also true that these encouraging and temporary measures were not subsequently withdrawn, notwithstanding the substantial changes which occurred in the course of subsequent years.

By maintaining a stable commercial policy, the Italian Government wanted to give concrete evidence of its contribution to the restoration of a multilateral trading system, with the firm hope that other countries which enjoy more favourable economic conditions would do likewise.

It is not the intention of the Italian Government to deviate from this course if our legitimate hopes are realized as a result of the co-operation of other countries.

The Tariff Conference which opens today will bring evidence of this co-operation by affording our partners an opportunity to appreciate the efforts which Italy has made in this field, on its own initiative.

The need for all participating countries to be prepared to make a maximum effort in respect of concessions to be exchanged on a reciprocal and mutually advantageous basis is, of course, a prerequisite for the achievement of the objectives of these negotiations. It is therefore obvious that the conditions and limitations which affect the possible concessions that some contracting parties may grant and the level of such concessions will certainly influence negatively the conduct and the results of the tariff negotiations.
Another important aspect of this Tariff Conference, to which the attention of the Conference has already been called on previous occasions, concerns the disparity of customs tariffs. The basic objective of the General Agreement is no doubt the gradual reduction of customs protection. However, the problem cannot be considered on the basis of a simple arithmetic comparison bearing on the tariff rates of the various contracting parties.

In each country the customs tariff in all its aspects is intimately connected with the economic and social structure of the nation. There is more: in fact, the customs tariff reflects this very structure. If it is to be hoped that, through negotiations like those which are about to open, we may make ever more important progress towards the general reduction of customs tariffs, it is obvious, however, that one cannot envisage achieving a levelling off of our tariffs unless we secure at the same time the necessary prerequisites for a general economic harmonization at international level.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I wish, on behalf of the Italian delegation, to express the hope that this fourth round of tariff negotiations may promptly yield concrete results by improving and supplementing what has already been achieved in the course of previous conferences, thereby contributing to a substantial extension of the tariff stability which is a sine qua non for the expansion of international trade.