I should like to say, Mr. Chairman, that we appreciate very much the opportunity given to the Heads of Delegations to make general pronouncements in connexion with the new series of multilateral tariff negotiations which you have formally opened today.

We appreciate it for three main reasons. First, because it makes it possible for us to convey to you and to the delegations assembled here the salute of our Government as well as its best wishes for the success of the work now being undertaken. Second, because it gives us the occasion of knowing the general position of the delegations which are meeting here today. And finally, because this debate will allow us to review very broadly what GATT has meant from the standpoint of Cuba's international trade, and to present some of the views of our delegation as to this new series of tariff negotiations.

As you are probably aware, Mr. Chairman, since 1948 both our international commercial policy and our foreign trade have been influenced by the General Agreement, which has become the basic regulating instrument of our trade policy and of our foreign trade relations.

Our decision of joining GATT in 1947 was determined by the fact that we sincerely believed in multilateral trade and also because we thought that an instrument including provisions as those contained in Articles XVIII, XIX, XXIII and XXVIII would offer us more tariff flexibility than the bilateral trade agreements which had previously regulated our foreign trade relations.

The negotiations procedures which have been followed so far made it possible for us to proceed in a selective manner in our tariff negotiations, to unbind certain tariff items and to raise certain duty rates for the sake of our internal economic development. Furthermore, for a country like ours, with a low tariff, the principle that a binding of a low duty should be considered as a reduction of a high duty was also of positive value.

On the other hand, the reduction and elimination of preferences which was made in accordance with one of the fundamental principles and objectives of the General Agreement, while improving the competitive position of certain competing countries in our market, strengthened at the same time our trade relationship with them.
So much, Mr. Chairman, about the advantages obtained by us under the General Agreement. The disadvantages, on their part, have been as numerous as grave.

In the first instance, reference should be made to the fact unanimously admitted that a country with a few export products cannot enjoy the advantages of multilateralism, especially its indirect benefits as a country with a very diversified export trade. Furthermore the concessions which Cuba granted in Geneva in 1947 were based on the pre-war price level and not on the higher price level already existing in 1947. Since prices have continued to increase, the degree of tariff protection which we believed to have attained in 1947 has not operated satisfactorily, because our tariff rates are in general constructed on a specific basis. As a result, we had to rely on Article XXVIII and accordingly pay twice for the protection required.

On the other hand, it has been extremely difficult for us to obtain in our negotiations under the General Agreement tariff concessions for our principal export products which, as you know, are very few in number. Moreover, the concessions obtained as well as those denied have not had in general, or would not have had if granted, meaning whatsoever since most of the contracting parties to the General Agreement have been authorized since our agreement entered into effect to maintain quantitative restrictions, because of balance-of-payments difficulties or reasons of another character. As a consequence, our exports to these countries have been limited by the restrictions and further affected by the exceedingly high level of internal taxation, as in the case of our cigars, and by the operation of State enterprises.

Another disadvantage to which we should make reference has been the unconditional and unlimited application of the most-favoured-nation clause to the so-called key countries. As a result, we have had to grant to several countries which did not make to Cuba any direct tariff concessions, all the concessions granted by Cuba to other countries and therefore to give without compensation the only instrument which Cuba had to obtain advantages for her exports, a situation applying particularly in the case of some countries which still maintain monetary and quantitative restrictions.

It is in these circumstances, Mr. Chairman, that Cuba enters into this fourth series of tariff negotiations. Our presence here will, I am sure, be considered as a new proof of our spirit of co-operation and it is our hope that the facts which I have just outlined will explain the reasons why it has not been possible for us to present lists of requests or of offers to all the contracting parties to the General Agreement.
As you know, Mr. Chairman, we are only expected to negotiate under GATT with a very small number of countries, but it is our hope that in the course of this Conference it will be possible for us to review with some of the other delegations the trade relations between their respective countries and Cuba and the problems affecting them at present, with a view to finding mutually satisfactory solutions.

It is our hope, Mr. Chairman, that the circumstances to which I have referred in my remarks, as well as the present level of exports and income of Cuba and the problems which we have to face, will be borne in mind by the delegates here present in the negotiations or conversations which may be held with them at this Conference.