1. The Contracting Parties to the General Agreement have decided, at their eighteenth session, to invite the Ministers responsible for trade and economic affairs of all Member countries to meet at Geneva at the end of November 1961. This meeting, which will last about a week, will be held during the period of the nineteenth session.

2. All regions of the world are represented in the membership of GATT and it follows that the Ministers will be called upon to consider problems of major importance relating to the continuing expansion of international trade, with a view to giving directives which will ensure a further step forward in bringing down trade barriers on a world-wide front. It may therefore be expected that Ministers from every continent, and representing countries in various stages of development will decide to attend this meeting.

3. The broad subject matter for discussion at the Ministerial meeting arises in the main out of the work done during the past three years in the GATT trade expansion programme. In the field of tariffs the Ministers will be in a position to take stock of the progress made in the Dillon round of tariff negotiations and to look forward towards further tariff disarmament on a world-wide basis, through the adoption of measures that may prove effective for this purpose.

Trade in agricultural and food products presents fundamental difficulties which are today generally recognized. Countries whose greatest efficiency lies in agricultural production are faced with severe restrictions in many markets and trade is so depressed that many efficient producers cannot even cover their costs. At the same time the world has an increasing need for cheap foodstuffs. Social and political considerations in many countries, whose economies are highly developed, have led to the adoption of price and income support policies and there is the problem of finding solutions to the difficulties in trade in agricultural products, which are acceptable both to importing and to exporting countries. The search for a solution to the question of agriculture is a matter of world-wide concern.

The need to expand the markets for primary products, semi-processed and light industrial goods is of vital interest for less-developed and developing countries. A number of them face particular difficulties in expanding their exports of products grown in tropical climates. Much work has already been done in identifying the obstacles which hinder the expansion of their export trade, and light has been thrown on the situation sometimes created by certain exports from developing countries in the markets of other countries.
4. It is expected that, in considering the general problems thus outlined and in formulating ways and means for resolving them, the Ministerial meeting will give further impetus to the work of the Contracting Parties as a whole. In view of the significance of the meeting stress has been laid on the need for a very thorough preparation of the ground in advance. This will be undertaken in September by the Council of Representatives and the results of their work, together with the preparatory work already undertaken by the Contracting Parties in connexion with the trade expansion programme, will provide the factual material to which the Ministers will address themselves.