I have been requested by the Honourable Alhaji Zanna Bukar Dipcharima, Federal Minister of Commerce and Industry, to convey his regrets that due to prior commitments at home, he is unable to attend this meeting in which we formally initiate the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations.

Although Nigeria agrees, as stated in our maiden speech when Nigeria acceded to the General Agreement in 1960, that the GATT is so far the best forum for co-operating internationally in the effort to expand world trade, nevertheless we are convinced that the most urgent and pressing problems of developing countries today in their bid to expand their trade, develop and diversify their economy cannot be solved merely, if at all, by tariff negotiations and exchange of concessions alone. Hence we welcome and have great expectations in the new approach to negotiations in GATT envisaged in the trade negotiations which as I said earlier we formally launch today.

We believe that with the necessary political will, this approach in GATT negotiations can provide developing countries not only with increased access in overseas markets but also open up avenues for our obtaining higher and more remunerative prices for our products. As is well known, it is upon the achievement of this goal depends our ability to earn the foreign exchange required to diversify our economy and raise the standards of living of our people, to which I believe we are all committed. Accordingly and in the words of our able Chairman, the problems of developing countries must be in the forefront of these negotiations.
Arising from these problems of the developing countries and their present stage of development, is their difficulty to offer tariff reciprocity. We are, therefore, gratified to note that the relevant section of the report of the Sub-Committee on the Participation of Less-Developed Countries has adopted the decision Ministers took last May that industrialized countries should not expect to receive reciprocity from us.

It also follows that the 50 per cent across-the-board rules is not pertinent to developing countries, but we are, nevertheless, anxious that in resolving the disparities issues products of particular interest to less-developed countries are not adversely affected. Indeed we strongly urge that contracting parties should agree to deeper cuts or total elimination of the barriers to the trade of developing countries.

Since Nigeria is essentially a producer of primary products - cocoa, vegetable seeds and oils, timber, rubber, etc. - we are naturally looking forward to greater and ultimately free access for these products.

I think it is here pertinent to recall that for some two years, a special group on tropical products carried out detailed studies and identified the major problems confronting the trade in tropical products; that the first test case on the decision of Trade Ministers in May last year on the question of cocoa and which has general application, as appropriate to other tropical products, namely that the problems confronting trade in cocoa should be resolved within the context of a commodity agreement that will ensure stable, equitable and remunerative prices to producers was a failure. It has now been decided that the Special Group on Trade in Tropical Products should be integrated into the machinery for the conduct of the trade negotiations reporting to the Trade Negotiations Committee. My delegation hopes that the disappointing performances of industrialized countries in the United Nations Cocoa Conference will not be repeated but wiped out so that when the time comes to take stock of the achievements of these negotiations, the developing countries which depend to a considerable extent on the export of tropical primary products will be in a position to say that they have benefited from the negotiations.

This leads us into the tricky question of the exception lists. These must not only be reduced to the barest minimum but there is also need to provide generally acceptable principles to cover what is implied by "overriding national interests, in order to avoid making countries judges in their own cause; otherwise confrontation and justification would be meaningless.
Most developing countries do not produce temperate products, nevertheless many temperate products compete with our tropical products. A particularly pertinent example is Nigeria’s groundnut. In view of the expressions of goodwill towards the less-developed countries in promoting their trade by the developed countries, one would have expected the industrialized and developed countries to recognize that in the interest of advancing the development of less-developing countries, primary production and indeed non-sophisticated industries represent fields that can best be left to underdeveloped nations. Instead, we find that non-tariff barriers such as agricultural protection, fiscal taxes and levies are erected against our products. The trade negotiations now afford the industrialized countries an opportunity of convincing us of their good intents by throwing the door open to negotiate these non-tariff barriers and obstacles to our trade. So far all that is available to the Trade Negotiations Committee is an unimpressive list of notifications of non-tariff barriers in which some governments are interested. The matter has not even been discussed in depth not to mention that no suitable arrangements have been worked out for their reduction and eventual elimination within the context of the trade negotiations.

Finally, we do not wish that preferences be overlooked. The case of the less-developed countries has been well documented and presented by the appropriate working party. We now strongly urge that these should be taken into consideration and implemented in the course of these negotiations. Otherwise we will, at a later stage, be caught by the yet unresolved and vexed question of whether or not the most-favoured-nation rates should be tampered with to afford us the necessary preferences.

In view of the foregoing, although my delegation welcomes the formal launching of the trade negotiations, nevertheless we find it most difficult to evaluate at this moment what the benefits that are likely to accrue to us in these negotiations will amount to and determine what their specific contributions to the negotiations will be. We do hope that this situation has indeed arisen from the fact that the developed countries are yet to agree on the basic principles that will govern their negotiations; that these will soon be resolved and a clearer picture of how we fit in emerge.

In conclusion, therefore, let me reiterate the very high hopes my country places in these negotiations. It is our belief that no greater tribute can be paid to the memory of the man whose name these negotiations bear than to see them concluded to the satisfaction of all, in particular to see that his objective of improving the lot of the developing countries not out of sympathy, not out of help, but to use his own words "because it is right", is achieved.

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