INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE 1960-61 TARIFF CONFERENCE

OPENING AND CLOSING STATEMENTS MADE BY MR. W.P.H. VAN OORSCHOT,
VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO GATT

At the opening of the meeting Mr. van Oorschot made the following statement:

"It is with great pleasure that I address myself to you with a word of warm welcome on this opening ceremony of the 1960-61 Tariff Conference.

"I was asked to do this as our Chairman, Mr. Barbosa da Silva, to his regret, is not able to be present today.

"It is indeed a great honour for us to welcome such distinguished participants at this meeting. In particular I address myself to the Vice-President of the Swiss Federal Council. I can assure you, Mr. Wahlen, that the Contracting Parties highly appreciate it that your Excellency could find time to be present here today.

"I should like to extend my welcome to the Director of the European Office of the United Nations on the premises of which we have the pleasure of meeting here this afternoon.

"Our welcome is further addressed to Monsieur le Conseiller d'Etat de Genève and the Mayor of the city of Geneva. I seize this opportunity to express the gratitude of the Contracting Parties for their co-operation and generosity in making the facilities of their city available for this conference. This spirit of co-operation of the local authorities has always made Geneva a city in which it is desirable to hold conferences of this type.

"We also welcome the Heads of inter-governmental organizations and representatives of Permanent Delegations.

"Further, I am glad to welcome Mr. Rey, member of the European Commission, as the representative of the Community. I should like to draw attention to the fact that for the first time in the history of tariff negotiations six contracting parties are represented by one delegate.

"Also a special word to Mr. Clarence Randall. I don't need to mention the important rôle you have played as Chairman of the Commission which contributed so much to the American trade policy of the last years. Your presence at this ceremonial meeting is an encouragement for the work to be undertaken.

MORE

MGT(60)66

English only/anglais seulement
"Further a word of welcome to Sir Richard Powell, Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade and to you, Mr. McKinnon, leader of the Canadian delegation who already attended the 1947 negotiations.

"His Excellency Monsieur Wahlen has declared himself prepared to address our meeting. I have therefore the honour to give the floor to the Vice-President of the Swiss Federal Council."

At the close of the meeting Mr. van Oorschot made the following statement:

"We are grateful for the important statements which we have just heard from several distinguished delegates around this table. After their able analyses it will be difficult for me to contribute more and in a significant way to the debate.

"I should have preferred to confine myself to the mere opening of the Conference, referring you to recent, excellent commentaries made by our Executive Secretary, which, no doubt, he could arrange to distribute, together with the texts of the statements made here today.

"Allow me now, in my capacity of Acting Chairman, to add a few words to what has been said.

"These negotiations will be important as an instrument to lower further the barriers of custom duties. They will also be important because the matter of the acceptance of the common tariff of the EEC will have to be dealt with at this time.

"This Conference should demonstrate the increasing importance of GATT as an international organization aiming at the promotion of free world trade. Favourable results will prove that all participating countries are willing to promote international trade not only in words but also in deeds.

"Thus far we have had four multilateral tariff conferences. There has been considerable change both in the economic world situation and in the intensity of world trade, since the first tariff conference in 1947 took place.

"In most industrialized countries balance-of-payments difficulties are a thing of the past. Quantitative restrictions have been eliminated gradually. Consequently tariffs have become a more important instrument for protection of the home market. We should, therefore, face the fact that the granting of tariff concessions at present may seem to participating countries a greater sacrifice than it did formerly.

MORE
"Also the shift from a sellers' market to a buyers' market has increased the value of tariff concessions. The general willingness to grant concessions in present circumstances may be less great than in those days when there was a large demand for imported goods.

"It is noteworthy too that a new feature has appeared in international relations: namely the institution of various regional organizations and groupings. Inside these economic units tariff barriers are rapidly being liquidated, while towards the outer world the existing tariffs are being maintained or new tariffs are being set up.

"It is generally accepted that these economic groups will not only prove to be favourable for the development of trade between their members, but will also improve trade relations with the outside world. However, it should be realized that this effect can only be obtained, if these groupings accept a liberal outward-looking trade policy and the relations between these groupings are settled in a satisfactory way. The coming tariff negotiations will have to prove the goodwill of interested parties.

"In addition to these facts which challenge us in the coming negotiations, there is another development in our world which will influence the trend of the negotiations. I am thinking here of the growing importance of the problem of assisting the newly developing countries of the world.

"One of the elements of the problem is the promotion of exports of the lesser developed areas in the markets of the highly industrialized countries. We should keep in mind that we can assist these countries, amongst others, by reducing tariffs on those products which are of special interest to them such as coffee, tea, cocoa beans, tobacco, oil seeds, certain manufactured products, etc.

"Well, Gentlemen, many delegates present here have asked in the past and today that the governments concerned would show willingness to co-operate in this limited though very important field, not only in words but by attacking effectively the daily widening gap between the less-developed countries and the rest of the world.

"A large part of the coming negotiations will probably take place between the industrialized countries. No doubt tariff concessions between these countries are of great significance to our organization, but if it should be possible to achieve at the same time a lowering of tariffs on those goods which are of interest to the less-developed areas, our organization would win the gratitude of many.

"I confine myself to these brief remarks. I have mentioned them only for the reason that the coming months will ask from us a maximum of effort, whereby the more restricted national or regional interests may be placed perhaps sometimes second to the world-wide interests.

MORE
"It is therefore to be wished that the spirit of co-operation may have a victory over the game of bargaining. If each team allows this spirit to sink well into their minds, taking into account the thoughts that have been expressed this afternoon by the various speakers, the success of these negotiations will be ensured.

"With this wish I declare the "Tariff Conference Geneva 1960" open."