Message to the Eighth Annual Conference of the
International Student Movement for the United Nations
from Eric Wyndham White, Executive Secretary,
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

I am delighted to have the opportunity to send a message to the Eighth Annual Conference of ISMUN and to wish all those attending the Conference complete success in their labours.

The students of today will be tomorrow’s administrators, technicians, businessmen and farmers. On your shoulders will fall the heavy responsibilities of guiding the world, through peaceful means, towards higher standards of living, particularly for those parts of the world that are comparatively underdeveloped, economically speaking. These are onerous, serious tasks to be faced. But you will meet the challenge with far greater confidence and with a far better chance of success if you have a thorough background knowledge of the basic causes of our present problems and of the evolution of cooperation at the international level, particularly in the past ten years. As the coming generation, whose influence will exert itself at a most critical period of man’s development, you will have the chance to look back over an initial period of international cooperation; you will be able to use your own judgment as to developments that have borne fruitful results or, on the other hand, have been comparatively disappointing. In the time to come you will be able to use your influence to stimulate constructive projects and to cut out the dead wood.

You are meeting in the heart of Western Europe, in peaceful and prosperous surroundings. In some ways this atmosphere may seem ideal for the work of your Conference. But the current economic prosperity of the industrialized areas – in particular the Western European countries – must not blind us to the fact that in large areas of the world’s surface, where millions of men and women scratch for a bare subsistence, there is neither prosperity nor economic security. It seems to me to be particularly important, at this time, that the problems of these underdeveloped countries, which are in fact not participating in the increasing acceleration of prosperity in the developed areas, should be given very close attention in your debates.

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In this short message I shall not refer in detail to the progress in eliminating barriers to the flow of international trade which has been achieved through the operation of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). A background paper on the subject has been prepared for this Conference. GATT provides a code of rules for fair trading in international commerce; and in the past ten years, under GATT auspices many trade barriers, including customs tariffs, have been reduced or swept away. Of course, many obstacles to trade remain; but the fact that countries carrying four-fifths of world trade among them have cooperated to reduce trade barriers on a considerable scale is significant. It shows a genuine post-war success in a particularly sensitive field of cooperation where in pre-war days there was a record of failure. And, by helping to increase the flow of trade across the seas and the land frontiers it has made more goods available to more people, with the probability of lower prices and a wider choice for the purchaser. In other words, GATT has helped to raise standards of living.

A set of rules for fair trade practices, the lowering of the levels of tariff walls over a wide area of trade, a forum where complaints can be investigated and put right and where countries great and small get the same fair hearing - these represent a substantial advance in international cooperation. They are a good example of what can be achieved, even in such a complex field as trade relations, when governments and their peoples show the true desire to participate in a concerted effort, at the international level, to achieve higher standards of living through an ordered, disciplined approach.