Background Guidance for Press and Radio Correspondents

TWELFTH SESSION OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE
GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

1. The Twelfth Session of the Contracting Parties to the GATT will open at Geneva on Thursday, 17 October at 3 p.m.

2. One of the main items on the agenda of the session is the consideration of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community. This Treaty — known as the Rome Treaty — was signed on 25 March 1957 by Belgium, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Italy. The Treaty was submitted for ratification in the respective parliaments and it seems probable that these ratifications will be completed by the end of 1957. The Treaty would then enter into force on 1 January 1958.

The Treaty provides for the creation, at the end of a transitional period of twelve to fifteen years, of a single customs territory among the six countries. This implies the elimination of customs duties between the six Member States and the creation of a common customs tariff. The Treaty provides for the elimination of quantitative restrictions on imports between the Member States; there are also special provisions regarding agriculture. Part of the Treaty deals with the proposed association of certain overseas countries and territories with the Community.

Following the signature of the Rome Treaty, it was submitted to the Contracting Parties for consideration in accordance with the terms of GATT Article XXIV, paragraph 7. Close working relations between the GATT secretariat and the Interim Committee for the Common Market have been established with a view to clarifying and defining the issues involved for consideration by the Contracting Parties, in particular regarding those provisions of the Rome Treaty which are relevant to the obligations set out in the GATT. On the basis of the preliminary work that has been done by the Intersessional Committee the Contracting Parties will proceed to examine the Treaty in the light of the provisions of the GATT.

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3. The Intersessional Committee at its meetings in August and September 1957 decided that a meeting of Trade Ministers should be convened during the Twelfth Session. It is expected that topics considered suitable for discussion at this meeting would include the main items of the agenda of the session: e.g., the European Common Market, trends in commodity trade, the machinery for international trade co-operation and the progress of expansion in international trade.

4. Among the other items of the agenda of the Twelfth Session are various matters concerning customs tariffs (including the new Brazilian tariff), and restrictions on imports (including the GATT programme of consultations with Contracting Parties who are applying such restrictions for balance-of-payments reasons). There are the customary reports and consultations under waivers. The continued application of Article XXXV to Japan by certain Contracting Parties is on the agenda. Proposals will be made for the admission of Ghana and the Federation of Malaya as Contracting Parties; the position regarding the accession of Switzerland will be discussed. There will be a review of trends and developments in commodity trade, as well as the experience of Contracting Parties on the liquidation of agricultural surpluses.

5. The election of officers for the following year will take place during the session. The Chairman of the Contracting Parties is Sir Claude Corea, High Commissioner of Ceylon in the United Kingdom.

6. In addition to the thirty-five Contracting Parties to GATT it is expected that a number of governments and intergovernmental organizations will be represented by observers.