I would like to stress the importance for Belgium, which is a member of the Benelux and of the European Economic Community, of the fifteenth session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade which is being held here in Tokyo. The session is important not only on account of the matters which are going to be dealt with but also by reason of the venue of this meeting. In this respect the selection of Tokyo is certainly appropriate if we are to arouse a special interest in our work amongst the peoples of the Far East.

It is within this context that I wish to make a few comments on the following points:

1. The question of assistance to the less-developed countries is a matter of primary importance. The problem of commercial exchanges with these countries is now assuming increasing importance in view of their desire to secure, through their export earnings, the means necessary to finance their plans for development. Such preoccupations should be received with active sympathy. My Government is also of the opinion that we should see to it that the assistance they might receive should not deviate, in its form, from the objectives laid down in the Treaty of Rome. In other words, it must come forth within the framework of harmonious trade increases.

The industrialized countries, and in particular the members of the EEC, should reaffirm their desire to assist the less-developed countries by every possible means such as investments, loans, technical assistance, and price stabilization schemes in the field of primary commodities. We must at the same time request them to accept it as an obligation to develop their economies in an orderly manner, because the seriousness of their problems is due not only to price fluctuations but also the lack of equilibrium and of diversification in the economies of some of them.

The arrangements to be concluded with these countries should be based on a few major principles such as the harmonization of producers' and consumers' interests, an adequate degree of efficiency in counteracting cyclical fluctuations and sufficient flexibility in order to avoid prolonging unduly the structural causes of disequilibrium. But the means should not allow us to lose sight of the final end, which is the rational industrialization and the diversification of the national economies supported by expanding markets and freer trade areas. An unavoidable consequence would be the elimination, over the long term, of the less efficient productions with the remedies necessary to allow for a gradual adaptation of the weaker countries.
2. A related problem is the question of exports of manufactured products from countries with exceptionally low wages. This is a very serious problem because the problem is with us as much as with those countries themselves.

I would wish to re-affirm here the determined intention of my Government to contribute to a harmonious development of trade on a reciprocal basis from the point of view of the benefits and obligations, within the framework of normal competition.

Naturally the best solution would be afforded by a multilateral settlement including the greatest possible number of industrialized countries. The normalization of competition and the laying down of lasting rules would allow a desirable expansion of trade with countries with abnormally low wages, while avoiding that the importing countries should suffer economic and social disruptions. It is clear to everybody, however, that the framing of such regulations would be a time consuming process.

Individual countries are still groping for their way in this respect because the legal and economic background varies with each country.

As you know, the question of Article XXXV is on the agenda of the fifteenth session. My Netherlands colleague will wish to make a statement before the CONTRACTING PARTIES when this point comes up for examination.

3. The Agricultural Problem

The agricultural problem is being examined by Committee II. There has been some mention of the need to revise the GATT rules. It is believed in some quarters that these rules are not altogether satisfactory because most countries agree in that they do not apply them to the field of agriculture. One may wonder, however, if this is due to the very nature of the GATT rules (which I, personally, do not believe) or whether this is attributable to a widespread refusal to envisage anything other than national agricultural policies.

There is an agricultural problem and I believe that we should all recognize its existence. Furthermore, it is difficult, before we are appraised of the results of the work of Committee II, to appreciate to what extent the GATT rules do not favour an expansion in trade in agricultural products. But there is one danger against which we should be cautioned at this stage: any settlement of the problem if reached on a restrictive basis would run counter to the principles written into the Rome Treaty and the General Agreement. If we are to conform to the ideas that we champion, a settlement at world level should only be reached if it was to contribute to the standardization of the conditions of competition on a wider basis.

The Fund decision which has been communicated to us will serve as a valuable guide for our future work. Let me merely recall here that the Benelux countries apply the same regime of liberalization to their OEEC and GATT partners.
I would merely wish at this stage to counsel moderation. While it is true that the ultimate goal should be an extension of the highest degree of liberalization to the greatest possible number of countries, we should not make the mistake of aiming at unduly ambitious immediate objectives with the consequence, under the pretence of non-discrimination, that the level of liberalization reached in the trade with certain areas might suffer a setback.

With this consideration in mind, my Government will readily support any constructive procedures which might be proposed by the CONTRACTING PARTIES in order to achieve a higher degree of trade liberalization at world level.