MEETING OF TRADE MINISTERS TO BE CONVENED
AT GENEVA IN NOVEMBER 1961

1. The Contracting Parties to the General Agreement have decided, at their eighteenth session, to invite the Trade Ministers of all member countries to meet at Geneva in the middle of November 1961. This meeting, which will last about a week, will be held during the period of the nineteenth session.

2. All regions of the world are represented in the membership of GATT and it follows that the Ministers will be called upon to consider problems of major importance relating to the continuing expansion of international trade, with a view to giving directives which will ensure a further step forward in bringing down trade barriers on a world-wide front. It may therefore be expected that Ministers from every continent, and representing countries in various stages of development will decide to attend this meeting.

3. The broad subject matter for discussion at the Ministerial meeting arises in the main out of work done during the past three years in the GATT trade expansion programme. In the field of tariffs the Ministers will be in a position to take stock of the progress made in the Dillon round of tariff negotiations and, looking forward towards further tariff disarmament on a world-wide basis, they may consider proposals for developing new techniques that may prove effective for this purpose.

Trade in agricultural and food products presents fundamental difficulties which are today generally recognized. Countries whose greatest efficiency lies in agricultural production are faced with severe restrictions in many markets. At the same time the world has an increasing need for cheap foodstuffs. Social and political considerations in many countries, whose economies are highly developed, have led to the adoption of price and income support policies and there is the problem of finding solutions to the
difficulties in trade in agricultural products, which are acceptable both to importing and to exporting countries. The search for a solution to the question of agriculture is a matter of world-wide concern.

The need to expand the markets for primary products, semi-processed and light industrial goods is of vital interest for less developed and developing countries. A number of them face particular difficulties in expanding their exports of products grown in tropical climates. Much work has already been done in identifying the obstacles which hinder the expansion of their export trade, as well as in throwing light on the situation created by exports from countries which have comparatively low costs of labour.

4. It is expected that, in considering the general problems thus outlined and in formulating ways and means for resolving them the Ministerial meeting will give further impetus to the work of the Contracting Parties as a whole. In view of the significance of the meeting stress has been laid on the need for a very thorough preparation of the ground in advance. This will be undertaken in September by the Council of Representatives and at that time member countries will put forward specific proposals for meeting the difficulties outlined above. These proposals will provide the factual material to which the Ministers will address themselves.