GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

Meeting of Ministers

STATEMENT MADE BY MR. AHMED BEN SALAH,
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In connexion with the first item on our agenda I should like very briefly to emphasize that the proposals of Committee III and the Programme of Action which it has presented constitute substantial progress in the field of ideas concerning trade between the industrialized countries and the developing countries.

I say in the field of ideas, for the modification of practices is a slow matter, and in the case of certain products, practices even evolve in a direction contrary to the one presumed to be that of progress.

This slowness and difficulty in implementing measures proposed could be made even more serious by the general character of the proposals.

Ultimately, it will probably prove to be inadvisable to proceed with general action in the field of tariffs or volume, unless sufficient account is taken of other factors which are often more important than the actual volume of exports and which are connected with the rational economic development of the developing countries.

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The less-developed or developing countries are referred to only as a single group; now, the less-developed countries differ greatly from one another and produce a great variety of goods and commodities to which, in some cases under regional or bilateral agreements, various systems are applied, ranging from simple tariff preferences or quota preferences to more complex systems of market organization.

It would therefore be appropriate to envisage separate criteria for each group of countries which are in the same region or which are faced with similar problems in the field of development and trade.

It would be desirable for the developing countries to decide of their own accord to co-operate among themselves in order to solve the problems common to them.

This could be the context for the reform of the institutional and legal framework of GATT.

This reform should not be limited to the legal status of the organization but should be aimed at modifying its structure on the basis of products perhaps, but above all on the basis of specific regions and sub-regions according to the criteria already mentioned.

On the basis of these groups of countries, co-operation with the industrial countries as well as between developing countries will be much easier and the measures adopted will be more effective and more conducive to the rapid and co-ordinated development of the developing countries.