GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

Meeting of Ministers

STATEMENT MADE BY MR. O.C. GUNDERSEN,
MINISTER OF TRADE AND SHIPPING, NORWAY,
ON 16 MAY 1963

Item I: Measures for the Expansion of Trade of Developing Countries as a Means of Furthering their Economic Development

I will first address myself to the Action Programme. We may consider it from two angles. First, as a guidance for our trade relations with the developing countries, a declaration of principles so to say. As such I do not think there is anybody here who would contest its value or would not willingly subscribe to it. The second aspect is its adoption as a firm legal obligation for all contracting parties. Norwegian imports from the developing countries are about one third higher than our exports to them, and the average tariff incidence for the imports is 1.7 per cent. That should indicate that we for our part are very much in line with the Action Programme already. But on some items there might well be scope for further actions, and we are prepared to take the necessary steps.

I can state that Norway for her part is willing to accept the Action Programme as a legal undertaking.

Norway was one of the countries which at the ministerial meeting in 1961 welcomed the proposal of Nigeria for duty-free entry for tropical products. It should therefore be of no surprise to anybody that we give full support to the general recommendations of the Special Group on Trade in Tropical Products.

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Neither have I any difficulties in accepting the recommendations of the Special Group regarding individual products. We will formalize the present duty-free entry of tea and coffee, and abolish the quantitative restrictions for the latter well before the end of this year. We are even prepared to go a step further and abolish the duty on bananas without awaiting the studies proposed by the Group.

We are aware that the General Agreement does not provide a complete answer to the present trade problems of the developing countries, but it is our hope that we can develop GATT to give such an answer and to become an effective instrument for dealing with their problems. We therefore wholeheartedly welcome any suggestions towards these aims and we find it appropriate that Committee III should explore the possibilities for useful studies, in collaboration with other agencies, of the trade potentialities of the developing countries.

Article XVIII of the General Agreement is important because it gives the developing countries the necessary flexibility within the Agreement to pursue their aims. But the way it is phrased today, it is perhaps somewhat dated. Since 1955 we have got a much clearer recognition of the necessity for positive joint action if we shall be able to solve these crucial problems. The Norwegian Government therefore welcomes the proposal that a working party should be established to investigate the possibilities for enlarging the institutional and legal framework for dealing with the trade problems of the developing countries. We think such a working party will have to tackle the problem of whether it is advantageous to specify more clearly than in Article I the objectives of GATT in this field, to consider by what means we most profitably can pursue those objectives, and to propose an adequate machinery.