STATEMENT BY MR. MAURICE RAMAROZAKA,  
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Until this moment, when I was called upon to speak, I had not ceased to hope that some fortunate contingency would finally remove from my frail shoulders the magnificent, but so very heavy burden of the honour of presenting to your Excellencies on behalf of your colleague, Mr. Georges Solofoson, Minister for Industry and Trade, his greetings and wishes for success in your deliberations, as well as the views of the people and Government of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar on the diagnosis and the remedies to be applied, within the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, to the maladies now being suffered by international trade and by all of us, large and small, weak and strong, rich and poor, very advanced or backward among the most backward of the international community.

But having seen no help coming and still seeing none, I must take the plunge.

The reason why we are meeting here is that international trade is sick.

It is suffering from an illness similar, I believe, to an occlusion of a particularly serious nature, which gives rise in our countries to troubles and diseases that are both varied and painful.

The strongest, and hence the most enterprising of us, have tried to combat these diseases and sufferings by measures to protect their trade and national production, which are so many stabs in the back for the system of multilateral trade established by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade signed in October 1947.

Arguments have been advanced here and in the Preparatory Committee to give these infringements a varnish of legitimacy. Some have even gone so far as to express their satisfaction at the extraordinary flexibility of the system of the General Agreement, which has enabled it to survive in spite of all the blows - some of them mortal - which have been struck at it recently. And they have drawn the conclusion that all is for the best in the best of all possible free-trade worlds, so that there is no need for seek any improvement.
But these are quarrels of the rich - of people who can afford to wait and see what happens. They are quarrels which do not concern us, the small, the weak and the poor, who live from day to day, and well know that if these infringements, which cause so many headaches to some people, enable those who practise them to breathe more easily, they merely deprive us of the air we need in order to live and thus condemn us sooner or later to die.

To hear some of the previous speakers, one might end in believing that the General Agreement is only a toy for the use of the rich, which we, the poor, were wrong to touch.

And on reflection, by whom and for whom was the Agreement concluded?

It was signed on 30 October 1947, that is to say, at a time when the majority of the States which now make up the international community were still in limbo, under the tutelage of a handful of Colonial Powers which, as can readily be understood, had other concerns than to watch over the special interests of their wards.

Of the twenty-three countries which initially signed or accepted the General Agreement, how many were there of those which are now called developing countries?

Whether we like it or not, the General Agreement was negotiated, concluded and signed by the rich, to form a club for the rich, the rules of which, based essentially on the presumed solvency of its members, practically excluded the poor, who, moreover, had no say in the matter.

Hence the firm purpose of egalitarianism and liberalism, displayed in good faith, the fulfilment of which the parties were happy to postpone during the prosperous years; for among well-bred people everything is permissible.

But the decolonization movement, which was intensified at the beginning of the 1960s, not so much under the impulse of generous ideas as under the pressure of well-understood national egoisms, gave birth to a whole crowd of poor nations, which very soon had the presumption to demand that their existence should henceforth be taken into account.

Ah! Yes, the poor!

After all, they can be useful, and in spite of their poverty, their needs and their numbers are such that they can contribute, and do indeed contribute to a great extent, to the expansion of world trade, of which the main beneficiaries are and can only be those who have a large share in this trade.
With great condescension, the rich accepted the idea that the poor must be given differential and preferential treatment on the world market, but Part IV, which they kindly agreed to include in the General Agreement for that purpose, has still not been put into effect after fifteen years.

But then the lean years came.

The markets are shrinking or closing in our faces. The prices of our products are falling, but the burden of our debt is increasing by reason of the wild fluctuations in exchange rates. And we must get further into debt, simply to pay our debts.

For how long?

We welcomed the unanimous decision taken last year by the CONTRACTING PARTIES to hold this meeting at ministerial level as a sign of renewal, and we entertained the hope that the CONTRACTING PARTIES were finally going to undertake the honest and sincere application of the provisions of the General Agreement in all their parts and for the benefit of all nations.

Conscious of the not insignificant part we have played in the expansion of world trade and the part we should and can play in the recovery of the present depressed economic situation, we thought it was time that our specific problems should finally be given the priority they deserve. The object was that we should no longer be mere spectators, if not victims, of the game and of the conflicts of interest of the Great Powers in world trade.

It is no doubt undesirable that GATT should be erected into a tribunal and that its operation should make it a shackle for international trade relations, but my delegation would see only advantages in the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that the contracting parties can no longer, as in the past, invoke some of the provisions of the General Agreement to justify actions which are manifestly flagrant violations of it.

Like all young nations, my country is particularly jealous of its independence. But we do not think our liberty would be alienated by conforming our conduct to a discipline chosen and accepted in full sovereignty.