1. The International Meat Council (IMC) held its eleventh meeting on 13 December 1984. It adopted the agenda set out in GATT/AIR/2082.

Admission of observers under Rules 11 and 14 of the Rules of Procedures

2. As no new request for observership under these rules had been submitted to the IMC since its last meeting, no action was required under this item. Since requests for observer status are submitted very infrequently (last time was December 1982), it was decided to omit this item from the agenda of future meetings, except, of course, when such requests have been made.

Report by the IMC's Working Party

3. Pursuant to the recommendation of the special meeting of the IMC, held on 9 April 1984, the IMC established a working party at its June 1984 meeting to, in short, analyse the existence of a serious imbalance or threat thereof on the international bovine meat market; make an assessment of factors leading to such an imbalance; investigate the effects in particular on traditional exporting countries as well as the effects on the objectives of the Arrangement; and finally make proposals for the consideration of the IMC, for suitable steps to overcome that imbalance or threat thereof. The Working Party was required to complete its task by December 1984.

A list of participants will be annexed to the approved report.
4. The Chairman of the Working Party (Mr. Antti Satuli, Finland) reported as follows:

"The Working Party, set up in June 1984 by the IMC, has held a number of meetings in the course of the last six months. It has completed a great part of its work as set out in its terms of reference: to date it has analysed the existence of a serious imbalance or threat thereof; made an assessment of factors that are leading to, or may lead to such an imbalance or threat thereof; investigated the effects in particular on traditional exporting countries of such an imbalance or threat thereof; looked at whether this situation is hampering the attainment of the objectives of the Arrangement; and finally, it has started discussions of possible steps to remedy the situation.

Some members of the Working Party have tabled general proposals which concern action to be taken as regards problems confronting the beef market on production, consumption and trade. However, more time is needed for the Working Party to discuss these, and other general proposals that may be tabled, and to agree on recommendations on more specific steps to be taken in order to overcome the imbalance or threat thereof.

Therefore, the Working Party requests that the IMC extend the time limit of the Working Party until the end of February 1985, by which time a full report on the work of the Working Party, including on proposals, will be made to the IMC. In view of the urgency of the matter, the Working Party feels that its proposals should then be considered at a special session of the IMC to be held by the end of February, rather than at the next regular session.

Furthermore, and for information only, in anticipation of the report of the Working Party to this meeting of the IMC, it was announced in the GATT/AIR calling this meeting, that the report would be found in document IMC/14. However, since the Working Party has not yet fully completed its work, no such report is available, except in draft form (Spec(84)68), a draft which so far only contains the factual parts and which has yet to be discussed by the Working Party."
5. The IMC took note of the report by the Working Party's Chairman and agreed to extend the time-limit until the end of February 1985, at which time the IMC will meet in a special meeting to discuss the full report of the Working Party. Several participants expressed concern over the delay in reaching agreed proposals for recommendations and one participant hoped that the IMC would be in a position to discuss the Working Party report, including recommendations, already at the end of January 1985.

**Examination of the functioning of the Arrangement**

6. Under this item the representative of Argentina said that in his opinion the importance of the Arrangement, its functioning and its capacity to promote solutions in difficult situations were currently being put to the test with the subject that the IMC has entrusted to a working party. In April 1984, this delegation, he said, expressed the opinion that the Arrangement worked very well as concerns exchange of information and statistics but finding solutions for certain problems faced by certain countries appeared to be another matter. All participants will have the opportunity to evaluate in substance the functioning of the Arrangement at the forthcoming special meeting or at the next ordinary meeting, seeing that the Working Party will by then have terminated its work.

7. The representative of Australia was of the opinion that the IMC, as a vehicle for the expansion and liberalization of bovine meat trade, had so far made only very limited progress. He said that the IMC's Working Party presented a real opportunity to make some progress in the area of trade liberalization, even though he did not feel overly optimistic about the outcome of that group's work. He noted that international beef trade still remained highly restricted, that production in importing countries continued to be fostered by very high support levels, and that subsidized beef exports continued to grow, representing a serious threat to world trade. Finally, he suggested that this seemed to be an appropriate time to request the secretariat to update one of its previous documents, i.e. IMC/W/10, called "Beef demand and its erosion by competition from other meats and low levels of economic activity".
8. The representative of the European Economic Community said that he could not share the pessimism expressed by the two previous speakers. In his opinion the Arrangement had functionned well so far. He agreed, however, that the Arrangement was being put to a test with the Working Party although the first test was passed successfully when the Working Party was set up without difficulties, in order to cope with a short term problem. The fact that all members of the IMC were ready to set to work and find out which were the problems was already a great success. Therefore, he said, his delegation was not pessimistic about the future of the Arrangement. Finally, he noted that another objective, besides that of expansion and liberalization, of the Arrangement should not be forgotten, namely stabilization of the international bovine meat market. Another one to keep in mind, mentioned also in the introduction and preamble of the Arrangement, is international cooperation.

9. Finally, it was agreed to request the secretariat to update in time for the June 1985 meeting document IMC/W/10.

Evaluation of the world market situation and outlook

10. For discussion under this item, the IMC had the following documents at its disposal: "Situation and Outlook in the International Meat Markets" (IMC/W/42); "Summary Tables" (IMC/W/2/Rev.9); "The Medium-term World Demand-Supply Outlook in the light of Article IV, paragraph 1(a) of the Arrangement Regarding Bovine Meat" (IMC/W/16/Rev.1); and a note by Australia concerning the medium-term outlook (IMC/W/37).

11. Reporting on the discussions in the Meat Market Analysis Group (MAG) concerning the situation and outlook, the Chairman of the Group, Mr. Patrick Robertson said that before giving his technical report he would like to share with the IMC some general impressions on the manner in which the MAG conducted its business at its 7th meeting just completed.
12. Regrettably, he said, the discussion was far from enthusiastic. As Chairman, he said, he must accept a large part of the responsibility for this but he believed there were other factors - more or less permanent - than his chairmanship. Firstly, he concluded that the parallel examination being undertaken by the Working party established by the IMC had covered much of the same ground as that normally covered by the MAG. Consequently, he suggested that many participants in the MAG had talked the subject out and their saturation with the topic was evident. That problem was hopefully temporary. The other influence on the effectiveness of the discussion might be somewhat less temporary and that was what appeared to him to be the uneven level of participation by the various members of the Group. Some members were far more active and considerably more open in producing accurate data. These members appeared to be reacting to the less than enthusiastic commitment of others and so the mood tended to approach the lower common denominator. He made this remark, he said, not to be critical but to encourage all members of the MAG to reflect on their performance in the Group in order that it might be as effective as possible in collating and analyzing the technical data on which accurate market forecasts might be predicated.

13. He continued to state that the general premise on which this most recent meeting of the MAG began was that the situation and outlook for international bovine meat markets was uniformly bad. By the end of the meeting, he said, he was able to determine, however, that this view was perhaps too categorical. Indeed, the outlook for the two major sectors of the international bovine meat market are contrasting sharply. Specifically, it was determined in the Group that the most serious developments in the international bovine meat market in 1984 had been, on the one hand, the significant deterioration of import demand in the Soviet Union and in most countries of the Middle East and North Africa and, on the other hand, the growth in surplus beef production in the EEC. These coincidental developments did create an extremely serious market situation which had imparted negative effects on traditional suppliers to countries in these regions. At the same time, however, he noted that the information supplied to the participants at the meeting did permit him to say that the depressed situation in the USSR
and Middle East and the high level of exports of the EEC would have had more serious effects on "traditional southern hemisphere" exporters, had the production cycles in these exporting countries been at a higher level than they in fact were. Moreover, the influence of the deteriorated supply-demand situation in Europe, the Middle East, and the USSR was further tempered by the variability of the international monetary situation in 1984 (i.e. the high value of the US$ coupled with currency devaluations or depreciations in a number of exporting countries resulted in increased prices for cattle in those countries).

14. More importantly, he said, the supply-demand situation in Japan and North America was such as to permit continued, reasonable levels of imports at only slightly reduced US$-denominated prices. Exporters to these important markets, therefore, fared accordingly. In addition, indications were that conditions in these markets would improve even if only marginally in 1985.

15. He stated that having nuanced his view as regards the outlook for international bovine meat markets, however, it seemed clear to him that there was a general consensus that the market situations in the EEC, the USSR and in the Middle East would deteriorate further in 1985. If one considered, that these markets accounted for roughly one-half of world bovine meat imports, the negative influence that this development will have on the global meat situation was obvious. Indeed, there was concern expressed by a number of speakers that the market situation in those areas could worsen to such an extent as to cause even more "spill-over" effects into other markets than they had to date. Additionally, virtually all major traditional exporting countries informed the Group of their forecasts which indicated higher exportable supplies in 1985. In brief, therefore, he said, indications were that we will have an even more lop-sided market situation in 1985 than existed in 1984. Moreover, there will be an even greater risk that the depressed market situation in one part of the international market will negatively influence the situation in the other part.
16. In summary, he said, it seemed to him that the analysis of the MAG led participants to the conclusion that the market outlook was considerably more complex than had been the view at the beginning of the meeting. If all things remained equal, it would appear that the situation in certain sectors of the international bovine meat market could be relatively stable or indeed improve perceptibly in 1985. However, at the same time, it would appear that there will be a further deterioration of conditions in the other sector and that this deterioration will present a clear risk of impeding the recovery of conditions in the first mentioned sector of the world beef market. As a supplementary comment, he added that several participants expressed the view that an amelioration in the supply-demand balance in the "EEC-Middle East-USSR" sector of world trade could be expected to begin at some time in 1986. However, the length of time it would take before market conditions returned to an acceptable situation was not specified.

17. Concluding, he said that the factors influencing the future of the market did not all appear to him to be benign. Therefore, the outlook remained fluid and, in his view, the future for the market was not entirely an optimistic one. It will require substantial cooperation among members of the Arrangement Regarding Bovine Meat to ensure, on the one hand, that the outlook does not deteriorate and, on the other, that it, in fact, improves.

18. The IMC took note of Mr. Robertson's report. Participants agreed with the contents of the report in general although some expressed a somewhat less pessimistic view of the outlook than that indicated in Mr. Robertson's report.

19. The representative of Argentina said that there was one specific point in particular that had a great influence on the bovine meat situation of Argentina, namely the fact that Argentina was limited to export to the so-called "dirty markets", except for canned meat, and the fact that the European Economic Community also exported its cheap beef
mainly to those same markets, had caused a crisis on the international market. This crisis, he said, had compelled his country to take a number of measures to alleviate the difficult situation but these measures had not yet borne fruit. The crisis had led seven of the most important Argentinian bovine meat plants to close down. Prospects for Argentina were more pessimistic than those of Mr. Robertson in his report since Argentina would not be able to profit much from any possible recovery on the United States or Japanese markets. Nineteen eighty-five will be a particularly bad year for Argentina unless a sudden reversal of the trends should take place and prices would go up.

20. The representative of Australia expected some improvement in the value of Australian bovine meat exports as well as in the level of the exports to its major market: the United States. Some slight improvement in prices to other markets was also expected in 1985. However, he said, taking a wider perspective of the world beef scene he was much less optimistic. He was particularly concerned about the uninterrupted growth of EEC production and stocks. Massive EEC supplies, he said, stimulated by very favourable producer support prices, will continue to overhang the world beef market in 1985 resulting in a continuation of very depressed prices on a number of markets. He noted that the EEC export subsidies cost the equivalent of around $1 billion in 1984 and said that with this amount of money available it was not surprising that prices on markets such as Egypt had reached such pitiful levels, levels at which the Australian exporters, which are very efficient, were unable to compete. The representative of Australia did not see any improvement in the situation in the near term. He said that while Australia would like to believe that the current surpluses in the EEC will diminish over the next few years as claimed by the EEC representative, he did not see this happening unless tough decisions were taken by the EEC to get its own house in order and not to seek to export its domestic problems onto world markets. Unlike the EEC beef industry, he said, the Australian cattle producers receive no financial support or subsidies from the government and were subject entirely to market forces. After a long period of contraction the
Australian cattle industry was showing cautious signs of recovery and herd-rebuilding had begun. However, this recovery was very much at risk and the industry was increasingly concerned about the threat of encroachment of subsidized EEC beef into the traditional markets of Australia, especially the prospects of such encroachment into the Asian Pacific region.

21. The representative of the European Economic Community said that it could be noted that there was relatively important herd-rebuilding under way in several exporting countries in the Southern hemisphere and he wondered how far this herd-rebuilding would go, especially taking into account that certain participants had indicated that they expected weak prices even after 1986. He wondered if it meant herd-rebuilding today, and a production tomorrow which would further decrease prices on international markets. As concerns the question of balance - or imbalance - on the world bovine meat market, he was of the opinion that there was no imbalance currently between imports and exports, therefore there was no imbalance on the world market. On the contrary, according to secretariat figures, there was an amelioration of the balance between imports and exports in 1984 compared to 1983. He further noted that inspite of weak demand, world trade in bovine meat had been kept at normal levels. As concerns international prices he said that these were low because of the prevailing bad economic conditions. However, he said, the prices the EEC observed on the world market had staid relatively stable. Since 1980, prices on the internatinal market has declined in US dollar terms. For most exporters, however, prices have risen in national currencies in the last two years. Today, he said, the situation in most exporting countries was relatively good. In the Community the situation was quite different, he said. Market prices were relatively weak and did not cover the cost since there was a strong cyclical upturn in slaughter, accentuated by the measures taken in the dairy sector. Therefore the Community had a small over-production but the evolution of the slaughtering will lead to a normalisation of the situation in 1986. If problems are expected in 1986 and the world market finds itself in imbalance, he said, it will not be because of the
Community but because of other countries which today were in a herd-rebuilding phase. If the economic situation continued to improve worldwide there was a good possibility that this meat could be put on the market without too much trouble. If, on the contrary, the international economic situation deteriorated in 1986, the situation in the international beef markets would be distinctly less favourable than today.

22. On the question of disequilibrium, the **Australian** representative was of the opinion that there was ample evidence of current imbalance and he said one of these was the 600,000 tons of surplus EEC beef overhanging the market and depressing prices; another was the very low prices on markets in North Africa and the Middle East, prices which were lower today than ten years ago; a third was the fact that more than a quarter of world bovine meat trade were of subsidized beef. The **Argentinian** representative also commented on the notion of balance, saying that export- and import figures were always in balance, no matter what. Balance, or rather imbalance in this case, was, in his opinion, a matter of international prices.

23. The representative of **Uruguay** said that he fully shared the views expressed by the representative of Argentina and that he did not agree with the analysis of the situation made by the representative of the Community. He was of the opinion that Uruguay's exports were being prejudiced, reflecting the influence on certain markets of subsidized exports; he was particularly concerned about the Egyptian market in this regard, a market where EEC was winning tenders at very low prices to the detriment of other exporters, notably Uruguay.

24. The representative of **New Zealand** found the situation on the international bovine meat market somewhat alarming, although there may be some small signs of encouragement such as a hope of better prices in the United States markets in 1985. He pointed out, however, that an increase in the US prices should be looked at against the background of very low prices last year, which were the lowest in five years. He was also concerned about the import demand in markets in North Africa, and
the Middle East where, he felt, New Zealand's potential was being seriously eroded by EEC beef subsidies. He was also deeply concerned that intervention stocks grow further and that these were exported, thus putting the burden of adjustment on the international market. As concerns the balance - or imbalance - of the international bovine meat market, he said that was not a question of import and export figures balancing - they always do - but rather a matter of at what price trade takes place, a price which had been driven down in recent years largely because of EEC surpluses.

25. As regards the medium-term outlook attention was drawn to IMC/W/37, in particular its paragraph 7. Some participants were of the opinion that since the time of writing of IMC/W/37 the outlook had deteriorated further. It was agreed to continue the discussion of the medium-term outlook at the June 1985 meeting of the IMC. The secretariat was requested to try to find medium-term forecasts for the USSR and East European countries with the purpose of completing the picture of the medium-term supply-demand outlook in IMC/W/16/Rev.1.

Examination of national policies linked to trade in bovine meat and live animals

26. One set of written questions had been received by the secretariat in advance of the meeting (IMC/W/43). The questions were submitted by Australia and addressed to Sweden, Brazil, Japan, the European Economic Community, and the United States.

27. Answering a question concerning export subsidies, the Swedish representative said that the agricultural policy in his country was aimed at a balance between production and consumption. However, there were no instruments to enforce such a balance. Producers receive agreed domestic prices for the quantities sold in the internal market. In the case of surplus production, producers depended entirely on what could be received on export markets. The present imbalance in Sweden's bovine meat market was due, inter alia, to general economic conditions which
had a severe effect on meat consumption, specially on beef consumption. In addition, the consumer subsidies were recently abandoned for budgetary reasons. The main instrument used to achieve balance was the price mechanism. As long as domestic prices remained at a higher level than the international prices, producers could not go on producing huge surpluses in the long run. The policy of balance also meant exports and imports to equalize quality differences and preferences, and to overcome seasonal variations. Sweden continued to import significant quantities of beef, mostly high quality cuts, from various sources. Several other measures, a part from the price mechanism, had been implemented with variable results. Such measures included calf slaughter premiums, low-price beef campaings (two campaigns of this nature were planned for 1985), rebates for school lunches – for beef and pigmeat – and, to be implemented in a near future, a two-price system for milk, which should reduce the dairy cow numbers and, in the long term, result in a decrease of beef production. Referring to the export subsidies, the Swedish representative indicated that these subsidies did not come from public sources. The producers paid the export costs, by the way of slaughter levies applied to all beef produced. These levies acted not only like a production disincentive, but producers would also receive much more for their cattle if these levies did not exist. As an example, he said that if there were no surpluses (and consequently no levies) producers of young animals would receive Kr. 4.40/kg more; Kr. 2.35/kg more for veal and Kr. 5.75/kg for cows. Horse, mutton, lamb and pigmeats were also levied (the pigmeat levy amounted to Kr. 3.15/kg). In the rapidly changing and declining consumption patterns, it took a certain amount of time for the producers to adapt to this new situation. Production surpluses continued in 1984 and would probably continue in 1985. Nevertheless, it was believed that the situation would improve somewhat in 1986.

28. Responding to a question related to the level and type of assistance provided for beef exports in his country, the Brazilian representative indicated that in view of the financial difficulties which Brazil had been going through, particularly its large foreign
debt the servicing of which had been rendered more difficult by high interest rates abroad, export assistance by the Government had been declining significantly during the past two years. Exports of bovine meat did not enjoy any special assistance not available to other sectors of the economy. It did, however, benefit from the same assistance available generally, which comprised, firstly, mainly the IPI Credit Premium. Industrialized products could benefit from this credit premium which was implemented originally in 1969 and was being gradually phased out in accordance with commitments undertaken by Brazil upon signing the Subsidies Code. It will be entirely phased out by 1 May 1985 (more information on this subject is available in document L/5603/Add.26). Exports of canned beef were eligible to benefit from this measure, and had benefited in the past. Secondly, and with regard to credit facilities for the purchase, internally, of goods for subsequent export, government intervention had ceased since mid 1984. Financing had been transferred entirely to the private bank sector, credit being therefore granted under normal conditions and at normal interest rates. Although no special export assistance had been lent to the bovine meat sector, the Brazilian Government had afforded favourable conditions for imports of beef, which had enjoyed duty free treatment for the past ten years. The Brazilian representative added that the current level of assistance provided to all exports, not only to beef, was low and declining, and that the changes over the past two years had all been in the direction of a reduction in government assistance.

29. In reply to a question related to the slow growth of domestic beef production in his country, the Japanese representative said that the supply and demand forecast of beef in the official long-term forecasts up to the year 1990, which was established on the basis of the year 1978, had no forecast figures between the base year 1978 and the target year 1990. The annual rate of increase of domestic production is estimated in the forecast, during the period it covers, at about 3.7 per cent. Actual figures indicate that production increased from 284,000 tons, product weight, in 1978 to 353,000 tons in 1983. This means that the average annual increase was 4.1 per cent. Therefore, the Japanese authorities considered that domestic production as well as demand were
increasing in line with the trend of the long-term forecast, although yearly variations may exist. This tendency was expected to continue, provided no dramatic economic turmoil intervened. Answering a question related to Japanese estimates that demand for grain-fed beef will grow more rapidly than for grass-fed beef, he indicated that this estimate was established in accordance with the demand situation in his country for high quality beef. In recent years, this quality of beef had met Japanese preferences and dietary habits.

30. Responding to a question related to the nature of production surpluses, "cyclical" or "structural", the EEC representative confirmed the answer he had given to a similar question at the June 1984 meeting (see document IMC/13, paragraph 39). He said that the bovine meat market was subject to cyclical fluctuations of production and prices and consequently the Community felt it was necessary to apply a stabilization and anti-cyclical policy of both production and prices in order to reach, in the medium-term, market stability. The situation of surplus production of beef was related to the cyclical slaughterings which were presently increasing, but was also amplified by the important slaughtering levels of dairy cows, provoked by the measures implemented to curb milk production. It was estimated that once the present slaughtering levels of breeding females will begin to slow down, the surplus production will decline, probably sharply. Should the economic recovery continue in the EEC the surpluses will decline further as a result of the continuing growth in consumption. Commenting on remarks by the Australian representative, who indicated that the present EEC surplus situation was, in his opinion, of a "structural" rather than "cyclical" nature and that the EEC policy did not seem to be of an anti-cyclical nature, the Community representative indicated that there was no reason to change the orientation of such a policy which was the best adapted to the market evolution. He added that data proved the cyclical nature of beef production. Turning to 1986, he indicated that slaughter of dairy cows, provoked by the measures in the dairy sector, should end by mid-1985 and consequently it could be expected that in 1986 production of beef will slow down somewhat.
31. In reply to a question related to the likely effect of the United States' Caribbean initiative on levels of beef production and export availability in the countries of the region over the next few years, the United States representative said that the only real difference brought about by the initiative was the removal of the 2 cts/pound import duty. In recent years there had been a significant reduction in production by and exports from those nations because of their economic and political situations. No quick turn-around was expected in this situation. In his knowledge, his Government had no specific plans to induce investment in the caribbean meat industry in order to stimulate exports to the United States.

The instability of world beef markets

32. At the June 1984 meeting of the IMC, it was suggested that this item would remain on the agenda for the December 1984 meeting. To assist the discussion, two documents remained on the table: a note by the secretariat on "the instability of world beef markets" (IMC/W/25), and comments on the subject by Australia (IMC/W/33).

33. The New Zealand representative said that the secretariat paper provided a good definition for the purpose of determining instability, and a good background to global production cycles and consumption levels. He indicated, however, referring to paragraph 15 of IMC/W/25, that the weakness of demand was not the only major cause of the decrease in prices. He also noted that the effects of export subsidies, forcing products from other exporters to be offered at lower prices, must not be overlooked mentioning that the global volume of trade had been maintained. New Zealand endorses the statement in the Australian note (IMC/W/33, paragraph 4), about the effects of instability. Efficient producers are penalized while beef producers in major importing countries are isolated against market force by government intervention. As a result, the burden of instability is transferred to efficient producers in exporting countries. Structural adjustment is transferred from high cost countries to low cost countries.
34. The Australian representative said that instability was having a serious effect on low cost efficient producers. Another important factor was the price depression effect, as opposed to unstable prices, which occurred not only in the Middle East or North Africa, but also in more established markets such as the United States.

35. The observer from the Economic Commission for Europe indicated that some experts were beginning to wonder whether official measures to achieve stability were not creating more difficulties than the instability originally inherent to market forces. He believed that much of the so called instability problems faced in the agricultural products markets, were the typical problems of residual markets left over after all kinds of stability measures had been taken at regional, bilateral and multilateral level. The typical example was the fact that practically the only free, non-ruled, markets for beef were the Middle East countries which accounted for some 30 per cent of world imports, and that was where market instability was most evident, for instance in the case of Egypt.

36. It was agreed that the subject of instability should be kept on the agenda for the June 1985 meeting of the IMC.

Date of the next meeting

37. The IMC decided to hold its next meeting on Thursday 13 and Friday 14 June 1985 preceded by the meeting of the MAG on Monday 10 and Tuesday 11 June 1985.