TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT

Statement by the Delegation of Cuba

Yesterday, as a result of the consultations that the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES has been conducting, we began an important discussion.

If the trade environment nexus is to become a permanent responsibility of the GATT, we shall have to define the exact scope of GATT's action. To that end, we wish to put forward a few general principles, without prejudice to the final decision that the CONTRACTING PARTIES will make in due course.

Clearly, environmental issues are acquiring new and increasingly frightening dimensions, and the destruction of nature, air and water pollution, and the depletion of raw materials and the resources essential to human development require a policy that is centred on the protection of man's environment and on man himself.

However, the world community is made up of both rich and developed countries, and backward and poor peoples, and these environmental problems affect them in different ways, although in the long term the consequences will be the same for all.

This must be borne in mind when decisions are made on how to solve environment problems, for if we fail to observe this difference which the late Prime Minister of India, Indira Ghandi, described so aptly when she said - "In poverty, man is threatened by malnutrition and disease; in weakness, by war; and in wealth, by the pollution engendered by his own prosperity. But, poverty and need are not the principal causes of the destruction of nature" - our quest for a just and balanced solution to this issue in which man and nature are inextricably linked, would be in vain.

This is not a question of imbalances or slogans. It is a question of recognizing that the causes of environmental problems in developed and poor countries are not the same and must therefore be treated differently. If we disregard this fact, the rich countries will protect themselves against the devastation caused by their own development to the detriment, yet again, of the poor peoples.
Environmental issues are of universal concern, since we must all protect our planet and ensure its survival; but we do not all have the same share of responsibility for doing so.

For some, the dangers are still to come; for all of us in the South, the causes we have been discussing in the areas of both trade and development are a fact of life, both past and present. They are the premises that must underlie all our discussions on the issue, whether here in the Council, in the consultations or in any other body.

Finally, we think that it is still premature to bring the environment into GATT on an institutional basis. We should continue discussing this informally among ourselves: the factual report requested by the ASEAN countries will provide a suitable basis for this informal exchange of views, as it will provide a more thorough knowledge of GATT’s experience in this field. My delegation also concurs with earlier speakers in preferring to wait for the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development so as to have clear guidelines.