Special Group on Trade in Tropical Products

PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 1968

Note by the Secretariat

1. The Special Group had been reactivated by the CONTRACTING PARTIES at their twenty-fourth session and the terms of reference and membership of the Group were set out in document L/2960 and Add.1. The Director-General was nominated Chairman of the Group.

2. The present meeting was convened in order to make preparations for substantive discussions at a later stage. The meeting had before it a note by the secretariat on "past activities in GATT and the establishment of a future work programme" (W(68)1) and a paper on "recent activities in other organizations relating to tropical products" (Spec(68)3).

3. On the suggestion of the Chairman the Group addressed itself to certain points of procedure, viz: (i) arrangements for considering the scope of the Group's work; (ii) documentary requirements and information to be requested from governments; and (iii) time schedule for future meetings of the Group.

Arrangements for considering the scope of the Group's work

4. The Group held a preliminary exchange of views on the scope of its work. The Chairman observed that problems relating to tropical products were a regular concern of the Food and Agriculture Organization and that many aspects of the problems were also being dealt with in UNCTAD. Furthermore, current discussions relating to the conclusion of certain commodity agreements also encompassed such subjects as tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. In the circumstances the Group should give careful thought to the scope of its own competence. Members of the Group shared the Chairman's view regarding the uncertainties arising from discussions elsewhere and his concern over possible duplication of work with other organizations. It was generally agreed that the Group should await the outcome of the discussions in UNCTAD II before taking a decision on the nature and scope of problems which it should deal with. It was agreed that governments should be invited to submit proposals in this regard after the conclusion of the UNCTAD session. The proposals received should be collated and circulated in advance of the next meeting of the Group.

5. The Group also considered the product coverage for its future work. Some members proposed that the Group's work should cover all the products dealt with by it during the Kennedy Round and enumerated in document L/2808, while other members thought that the Group should be guided by the commodity notes in the secretariat analysis of the Kennedy Round results in document COM.TD/48/Rev.1.
After a discussion of these views the Group agreed that for purposes of preparatory work and in the formulation of proposals, attention should in the first instance be given to the following products: tea, coffee, cocoa, bananas, vegetable seeds and oils, and spices. Other products could be included at a later stage.

Documentary requirements and information to be requested from governments

6. The Group was advised that the secretariat had put in hand the revision of the 1963 studies (see W(68)1, paragraphs 4 and 5) and intended to circulate notes on the material to be included in the revised version in the near future. In the light of the instructions of the CONTRACTING PARTIES it was stressed that the documentation for the Group should include sufficient data on internal charges and revenue duties on tropical products. It was agreed that the secretariat should concentrate on revising the previous studies, incorporating the outcome of current discussions and activities in other organizations as well as information on internal charges and revenue duties. On the latter point the Group expressed the hope that governments would co-operate in furnishing the necessary information.

Time schedule for future meetings of the Group

7. In view of the need for governments to consider the conclusions of the second session of UNCTAD and to take policy decisions in the light thereof, it was generally agreed that the next meeting of the Group should not be held until an appropriate period had elapsed after the conclusion of that conference. The actual date should be left for the Chairman to decide in consultation with governments.