MEETING OF 5 MARCH 1992

Note by the Secretariat

1. The seventh meeting of the Negotiating Group on Market Access was convened by GATT/AIR/3297 of 28 February 1992 and chaired by Mr. G. Denis. The Group adopted the following agenda:

(a) Comments by participants on their draft Schedules of concessions and commitments;
(b) General review of the state of the submission of draft Schedules;
(c) Other business.

2. The Chairman proposed to take up under the agenda item "Other business", matters related to the circulation of draft Schedules, the evaluation of market access offers and the date of the next meeting.

3. He recalled that at the Trade Negotiations Committee meeting of 13 January 1992, the Group had been given the task to engage in a process of submission of Schedules of concessions and commitments necessary to complete the market access negotiations in time for the overall outcome of the Uruguay Round before Easter this year.

(a) Comments by participants on their draft Schedules of concessions and commitments

4. The Chairman referred to two Secretariat notes that had been prepared with a view to facilitating the negotiating process. The first related to the preparation of the Uruguay Round Schedules of Concessions (document MTN.GNG/MA/W/15), and the second to the preparation of the lists of specific binding commitments under the agriculture reform programme. He emphasized the importance of the timely submission of comprehensive market access concessions and commitments, so that a substantial and balanced Uruguay Round package could be achieved within the time-frame envisaged.

5. The Group heard statements by various delegations on the current situation regarding submission of their country draft Schedules. Some participants stated that their authorities had submitted comprehensive draft Schedules in accordance with the procedures and modalities outlined in document MTN.GNG/MA/W/15 and the Draft Final Act. With respect to industrial products, the draft Schedules consisted of either the original offer made in 1990, or of an improved offer which in some cases went beyond the Montreal target, or of an offer adapted in the light of
negotiations with other participants. Some participants stated that they had not yet been in a position to table comprehensive draft Schedules either because key bilateral negotiations with their main trading partners were still underway or because they were waiting for the outcome of other major participants' offers.

6. Other participants expressed their governments' intention to submit comprehensive draft Schedules in accordance with the modalities set out in the draft Final Act in the very near future. Reasons mentioned for the delay of the submission of these Schedules included technical difficulties, especially with respect to the preparation of the lists of specific binding commitments under the agriculture reform programme; negotiating concerns, such as the uncertain outcome of the negotiations in certain product areas; or broader substantive political issues which required further discussion under Track Four. One participant stated that his authorities felt that they were not in a position to submit a draft Schedule at this juncture. The on-going consultations between his authorities and a major trading partner had yet to be concluded, and such a draft Schedule would have projected an inaccurate picture of the next-to-final offer.

7. Many participants pointed out that their draft Schedules were conditional, and might have to be revised in the light of results reached in the sectoral negotiations as well as the market access area in general.

(b) General review of the state of the submission of draft Schedules

8. The Chairman invited participants to provide their preliminary substantive reactions to the comments made under agenda item one. In his view, there was a mixed picture emerging. On the one hand, progress was being made on key issues and it was encouraging that many participants intended to follow fully the modalities of the Draft Final Act. On the other hand, there were apparent disparities, at this stage, between the stated intentions of a number of participants and various elements of the Draft Final Act.

9. Many participants expressed disappointment at the fact that a number of participants had either submitted non-comprehensive draft Schedules, or had not as yet submitted any such documentation; a timely submission would have allowed the necessary evaluation exercise of the next-to-final offers to take place. In addition, the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the negotiations between the two major trading partners and the sectoral negotiations had contributed to this delay. One participant, however, noted the importance of maintaining flexibility in the process.

(c) Other business

- Circulation of Schedules

10. The Chairman stated that part of the process of the final stage of the market access negotiations involved the circulation of the draft Schedules which would allow for a final balancing of commitments. While
in principle all participants should have been exchanging equally complete Schedules, in practice at this stage, there appeared to be a difference in the way in which the various national submissions had been prepared. He stressed that in order to be complete the draft Schedules needed to be comprehensive in their coverage, which meant that both the agricultural and industrial products within chapters 1 to 97 of the Harmonized System Nomenclature or chapters 1 to 99 of the Customs Co-operation Council Nomenclature should be covered. Only participants which had tabled comprehensive draft Schedules could expect to participate in the circulation of draft Schedules and receive the submissions made by other participants.

11. A few delegations stated that in their view "comprehensive" submission meant draft Schedules covering on a tariff line basis offers on both agricultural and non-agricultural products. Only such submissions would qualify for participation in the circulation of draft Schedules. They were, however, prepared to leave the decision on circulation to the judgement of the Chairman.

- Review and assessment of the market access negotiations

12. The Chairman stated that this issue was of great importance, and the Secretariat would undertake the technical analysis as soon as a sufficient number of submissions were available. The Group agreed to return to this matter at the next meeting.

- Date of next meeting


- Conclusion

14. The Chairman in his concluding remarks stated that it was clear that serious and good faith efforts to move the market access negotiating process forward were underway. In agriculture, the task ahead included the need to complete the draft Schedules where there were gaps. In this context, he added that, without prejudice to any developments that could take place under Track Four, the Draft Final Act set the framework for the work in the Group. On non-agricultural products, the various tariff and non-tariff negotiations should be brought to a speedy conclusion. Participants who had not yet submitted their draft Schedules should do so expeditiously.