

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF A GROUP OF LESS-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON 4 FEBRUARY 1965

1. Under the Chairmanship of H.E. Mr. E. Letts, Ambassador of Peru, the twenty-third meeting of a group of less-developed countries was attended by representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jamaica, Pakistan, Peru, Sierra Leone, Spain, Tunisia, United Arab Republic, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia.
2. The meeting was held to explore the possible ways in which the International Trade Centre could be of further help to the less-developed countries in the field of trade promotion. To facilitate an exchange of views on this subject, the Deputy Executive Secretary, and Mr. M.G. Mathur, Chief of Development Division, and Mr. H.L. Jacobson - Head of the Trade Centre - as well as Mr. Santiapillai were invited to address the meeting.
3. The Deputy Executive Secretary welcomed the exchange of views on the subject. Referring to the previous meeting of the less-developed countries, he pointed out that whatever delay had been encountered in resuming work on the rules for the participation of less-developed countries in the Kennedy Round, was attributable to the continuous efforts of the secretariat to overcome the difficulties which had arisen in arriving at agreed procedures. Despite the concern of the industrialized countries with the current agricultural issues, considerable progress had been achieved, so that the discussion on rules of participation of less-developed countries could soon be resumed. The Deputy Executive Secretary then briefly retraced the origin and development of the Centre, inviting less-developed countries' representatives to contribute their suggestions as to the future work of this enterprise.
4. Mr. Jacobson then explained the pragmatic approach applied to the establishment of the Centre, and enumerated the work and results so far achieved, under the following headings: liaison arrangements, documentation unit, correspondence-answering service, the FORUM, the Register of Sources of Trade Information and the Manual of Export Promotion.
5. Mr. Santiapillai submitted, for the consideration of the less-developed countries' representatives, some of the ideas evolved within the secretariat and the Centre as to how the Centre could be of immediate practical assistance to less-developed countries in promoting their exports; namely, by undertaking preliminary surveys of less-developed countries' export opportunities and, where appropriate, follow these up with assistance in formulating requests and drawing up terms of reference for market research projects to be channelled through various technical assistance funds. He further suggested International Trade Centre assistance in the fields of joint promotional campaigns and trade fairs.

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6. Representatives generally expressed appreciation of the Centre's work and felt that its resources would need to be strengthened so that it might continue and expand its activities.

7. The representative of Brazil, while appreciating the need for adequate proportion between the resources of the Centre and its programme, felt that much of these resources were at present being absorbed by the correspondence-answering service, and that the Centre's task would be greatly facilitated if it endeavoured to obtain fuller co-operation from national trade information services. This would involve, in some cases, reversing national trade centres' approach to the dissemination of information. He pointed out that the selective publication and distribution of existing market research reports on products of interest to less-developed countries would be of great interest to them. He also felt that the suggestion of joint promotional efforts should be further investigated.

8. The representative of Jamaica drew attention to the difficulties less-developed countries encountered in selecting the appropriate trade fairs in which they can fruitfully participate, and suggested that the Centre could be of practical assistance if it could provide some guidance on this subject. Referring to joint promotion schemes, he stressed the desirability of countries retaining the national identity of their products. However, he expressed interest in exploring further this aspect of trade promotion.

9. The representative of Yugoslavia put forth the idea that the Centre could provide information on long-term commodity trends and projections.

10. The delegate of Israel stressed that a quarterly magazine, such as the FORUM, was incompatible with the factor of speed, essential in the dissemination of trade information. In his opinion, the active co-operation of national centres should be pursued. As regards the correspondence-answering service, he felt that individual traders seeking information of direct relevance to a particular transaction in hand, should have priority over any enquiries of a more general character. The Trade Centre should not limit itself only to enquiries from governmental bodies. On the suggestion of market surveys, he thought that this could usefully include on-the-spot investigation, by the Centre. He also suggested that the Centre should undertake the analysis of export insurance policies and of shipping contracts, thus helping to adapt these more closely to the requirements of less-developed countries.

11. The representative of the United Arab Republic was of the opinion that valuable work was being done by the Centre acting as a catalyst between importers and exporters. He stressed the importance of this "clearing house" function and suggested that some income could be derived from it for the Centre by charging a small commission. He pointed out that investigation of the work undertaken by the Economic Commission for Europe on standardization of international specifications could be of interest. He welcomed the programme of fellowships for training in export promotion. Regional offices of the Centre, in Africa, Asia and America, though they might involve considerable costs, could be kept in mind for the future.

12. The representative of India considered that the Centre's effectiveness would depend on its ability to supplement the existing trade information services of less-developed countries. In this context he felt that the suggested preliminary surveys might not be sufficiently probing to bring about, eventually, a real increase in export earnings. However, the methods employed for such surveys would determine their effectiveness. He also expressed interest in joint promotional efforts, which could possibly include the study of warehousing facilities. He felt that careful selection of the type of joint promotion would be needed, and enquired if cost analysis would be submitted to the Expert Group.

13. The representative of Uruguay said it would be interesting to know more about the two publications mentioned. It was difficult, he felt, to evaluate, at this point, the work of the Centre. Some consolidation might be needed before this could be done. As regards the subject of market surveys, he pointed out that a possible starting point could be the publication of market studies undertaken by some countries on other industrialized countries. As these markets are common export targets, detailed information on them would be of interest to all less-developed countries. This suggestion, he added, could probably be carried out at a reasonable cost.

14. The representative of Pakistan expressed interest in the work of the Centre and hoped to see its activities develop.

15. The representative of Congo (Brazzaville) felt that the training courses on export promotion would respond best to the needs of African countries. The representative of Ghana considered with interest the suggestion of joint promotional measures. He suggested that some countries would need guidance in order to benefit from the correspondence-answering service.

16. The representatives of the secretariat expressed their thanks for the useful views put forward and indicated that these would be of great assistance in preparing detailed proposals for the Centre's future activities.