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As we meet here today, we find ourselves in a global economic crisis in the midst of dire warnings of another Great Depression. For the first time in the post-war era, world trade is declining in a pattern reminiscent of the downward spiral of the early 1930s. By experience, we all know that a decline in trade accelerates recession and recession entails further decline in trade. Should we take action now? Or should we remain with our arms folded until this vicious circle drives our globe into a third global catastrophe?

The answer is self-evident, and so is the mandate for this meeting. Should we fail to take prompt and effective steps to strengthen the free-trading system, we, Cabinet Ministers present here, must be prepared to assume the responsibility for the consequences before our brothers and sisters and generations to come.

The foremost threat to the GATT system comes from the protectionist measures which have been increasingly resorted to by many countries. Voluntary export restraints or orderly marketing agreements are no longer the only codeword for "new protectionism". Other trade-distorting measures, such as the abuses of anti-dumping or countervailing procedures, are now posing another severe threat to the exports of developing countries.

Especially disturbing is the fact that many of newer import restrictions are bilateral in nature. Such practices have endangered the very foundation of the multilateral trading system. Furthermore, they will invite a series of trade conflicts comparable to those in the inter-war period.

Therefore, the delegation of the Republic of Korea believes the following actions to be both urgent and imperative: we all should first declare a "ceasefire" to any new protective measures; and, the developed countries should dismantle the existing measures inconsistent with the GATT rules and progressively eliminate those measures hampering the flow of goods even if they fall under the framework of GATT.

The Korean Government has continued to pursue import liberalization despite its chronic trade deficits. In this regard, I would like to report to this meeting that the ratio of import liberalization has reached 77 per cent in 1982 and the same will be approaching the level of advanced countries by 1986. At the very time we are moving in the direction of

freer trade, many of our trading partners are moving in exactly the opposite way, unfortunately, however. If such a trend continues, how can we keep pursuing our import liberalization policy as scheduled?

I can conceive of no better opportunity than this forum of Trade Ministers to express our firm commitment to the principle of non-discrimination. Stringent criteria and an improved multilateral surveillance mechanism shall have to be embodied in any safeguards agreement.

As regards the dispute settlement mechanism, the Korean delegation endorses the "consensus minus two" approach as an important step forward. Further improvement would be possible if we set a specified time-limit to each stage in the process of settling disputes.

My delegation attaches great importance to the implementation of the provisions of the General Agreement relating to the developing countries. However, we are opposed to any attempts to impose on developing countries excessive obligations not commensurate with the latter's stages of economic development.

For this meeting of Trade Ministers, it is not enough just to issue a formal declaration of intent. What is more important is the concrete actions required to narrow the gap between the precept and practice that has grown so wide over the past few years. In the meantime, we are ready to participate in any study, discussion and negotiation on all constructive proposals within the framework of the General Agreement.

The matters before us are of such magnitude and urgency that we cannot afford to wait another several years for the next GATT Ministerial meeting. Therefore, I propose that we Ministers meet again in three years' time in order to review the further developments in world trade and the implementation of our political commitments at this meeting.

We stand at a crossroad, with one road leading in the direction of free trade and the other leading back toward the dark days in our history. I do believe that our collective wisdom would not allow the nightmare of the 1930s to repeat itself. With determination and foresight, let's face the challenge we are confronted with. And let our concerted efforts here in Geneva be remembered in the years to come.