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It is a great privilege for me to address this distinguished body of Trade Ministers. On occasions like this we indeed feel - in the words of Vice-President Haferkamp - neither isolated nor lonely. I would like to begin by expressing the gratitude of the United Kingdom delegation to our Swiss hosts, so hospitably and wittily represented by President Honeggar, to you, Mr. Chairman, who have presided with such a deft but light touch over our deliberations: to Mr. Dunkel and the GATT secretariat who have at all times articulated so eloquently and so sensitively the letter and the spirit of the GATT, which unites us all: and to all those who have played a part in the preparation for this meeting.

We are met here in Geneva to address ourselves over three and a half days to a series of problems which are fundamental to the present well-being of the trading world and to the future hopes of our peoples. In eight minutes there is little time for rhetoric and indeed I feel that rhetoric would be out of place here. Nor do I claim at this meeting to be more than the standard bearer of the United Kingdom.

I would like to address myself realistically and pragmatically to the problems with which we are faced. I emphasize, as indeed have other speakers - and I would like to pay particular tribute to the perceptive contributions of the distinguished representatives of the Fund and the World Bank - I emphasize that the problems of the GATT only reflect the wider economic and monetary problems of the world. Nor do I propose to diagnose the underlying situation. Too much diagnosis may only encourage hypochondria.

Let us however start from the premise that we are in the sharpest, most prolonged recession since the 1930s, that the protectionist pressures in each of our countries are acute, that unemployment - though each country and certainly developing countries, will have a different perception of the dimensions of that problem - has increased to a level with which we are all deeply concerned. Against that background it is important for us all to reaffirm our commitment to the open trading system, which the GATT has done so much to maintain and strengthen. This I gladly and unhesitatingly do.

We are then invited by some to confess our sins against that system. Sin in this context may be a matter of definition. Let me however in the presence of the High Priest, Mr. Dunkel, admit that my remorse is tempered by the knowledge that only 10 per cent of manufactured imports into the United Kingdom from the world outside are subject to trade barriers of any kind.

I will leave to others to debate the question of agriculture which in every country - I think I can say without fear of contradiction - is always a special case. Let me in that context assert that to judge the success or failure of this conference by reference to agriculture alone will be to give the wrong balance to our debates.

But now I turn to the question of a standstill on protectionist measures. I must confess that for me a standstill must by definition mean a reaffirmation of the fundamental Articles of the GATT. If that however is too limited an approach, let me say that it would be unrealistic to assert our support for a form of standstill which we know in our heart of hearts cannot and will not be observed in its entirety.

I am then led on very properly to consider the question of safeguards. Of course safeguards should be within the GATT system. Indeed there are many of us who have had recourse to such measures. We regard them as a necessary safety valve in a period of world recession, without which the GATT boiler would have exploded. But let us recognize that this question may need to be refined. Let us recognize that a measure of transparency is called for. Let us recognize that a measure of accountability may be required.

Next we must recognize that our economic relations cannot be static. As the pattern of our economies alters, so must the international framework within which we conduct them. As the emphasis in our economies moves from agriculture to manufacturing, from manufacturing to services, so we must reconsider our obligations in the field of services. We have heard, and rightly heard, of the needs of the developing world. I hope too that it will be recognized that other countries, other economies, also have needs. There is a vacuum in services. I hope that work in GATT, no more is asked for, can be initiated in this field, but not to the exclusion of work by other international bodies.

I turn now to a question which arises from the preamble to the General Agreement itself. It speaks of reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements. No one doubts the claims and needs of the poorest countries. But in all candour, I must invite my colleagues from certain of the more advanced developing countries (NICs) to acknowledge that their progress undoubtedly owes a lot to the GATT system. The same will apply in the future. In the GATT we all have obligations as well as rights. As circumstances alter, so obligations and rights have to be adjusted. I ask that we should agree this week to study these inequities.

Finally I come to the question of dispute settlement. We must recognize that it is not sufficient to evolve a contractual framework for our actions if breaches of that framework carry no redress. If that be the case then our words will be lost in the wind. We recognize the crucial element of the conciliation process, the work done in the past by GATT Panels. But contracting parties must respect existing obligations.

In conclusion, I must say that I have not approached and I do not approach this meeting lightly. I recognize the benefits of the open trading system, not just to my own country but to the whole world. I say this not in a spirit of moral fervour but I hope of enlightened self-interest. I believe that Trade Ministers should from time to time address themselves seriously and in a spirit of give and take to the problems thrown up by the pressures that arise, including those that may not have been clearly foreseen by the founding fathers of the GATT.

None of us will I suspect emerge from this conference totally satisfied. But I hope all of us will emerge reassured that the fundamentals of the system have been thoroughly reconsidered and have been found still to be sound and relevant to the times in which we live.