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I wish to lend full support to what has been said by other speakers about the importance of maintaining the open trading system which has facilitated the very great world-wide economic expansion of the last thirty years. Together with earlier speakers, I too recognize that the present economic difficulties arise much more from various other fundamental factors such as interest and exchange rates and energy crises rather than from the imperfections and failings of the GATT. Rather do these other developments put a strain on the GATT system. For that reason I believe that it would only make a bad situation worse if we were to delude ourselves into thinking that we can solve the world's economic difficulties by making major changes in the GATT. This kind of thinking could bring us back with inevitable adverse consequences, to the drawing board from which GATT started in 1948. Ireland's advocacy of free trade is no mere platitude. It is something in respect of which we have carried out our obligations to the full. In that process we have made considerable sacrifices. As a result of our acceptance of these obligations we have had to make profound adjustments to our economic system and these, together with the effect of market forces, have brought about dramatic and painful changes in the Irish economy.

For example, in the textiles, clothing and footwear industries, employment has fallen by one third in the past ten years. Imports of these products now account for 70 per cent of the home market for clothing and 86 per cent of the home market for footwear. Significant changes have also taken place in our agriculture sector.

These adjustments have involved a high price in terms of social disruption and costly investment in alternative sources of employment. As you might imagine our adjustments have been rendered all the more painful by the world-wide economic difficulties of recent years which have prevented us from realizing anything like the full potential of the efficient, market-orientated economy which we have endeavoured to create in response to our international obligations. Having endured the sacrifice of these structural adjustments we now call on our partners to play their full part in ensuring the continued expansion of free trade and to desist from measures which could detract from the progress which has been made up to now, by, inter alia, calling into question the fundamentals upon which we have sincerely agreed in the past.

Growth and development in international trade is important for the prosperity of all countries. For small countries such as Ireland it is vital. Two thirds of our employment and half of our gross national product depend on exports. On the other hand a very large proportion of our fuel and industrial materials have to be imported. Large countries with relatively less dependence on foreign trade can absorb some degree of retaliatory protectionism. Their large home market gives them relative immunity. Not so, however, for small countries with open economies for whom any increase in barriers to trade could have very serious effects.

In coming to this important international gathering we feel that it would not be wise to look for dramatic changes in the international trading system. Such aspirations would not be realistic and could lead to a worsening rather than an improvement in the present situation. It would, in our view, be more appropriate to acknowledge and to cherish what has been achieved up to now, to make the most of existing mechanisms and to honour existing commitments. It would be a significant achievement if all the contracting parties committed themselves to act in accordance with their current obligations under the GATT. The Agreement has stood up well to the test of time. There are more than enough economic statistics to prove this point. We should stop making unreasonable demands upon the system. If these demands are intensified, indeed if they continue to be made with such frequency, the strain will become too great and I fear that the system may well break down.

Coming so soon after the Tokyo Round where agriculture was especially identified as a special case it is not reasonable to seek a revision of the bargains which were made at that time. We should not overlook the fact that the development of agriculture in the EEC has enabled the Community to become the biggest importer of both agricultural products and manufactured goods and, as has been pointed out, the most important trading partner of the Third World. In the past ten years in Ireland, employment in agriculture, forestry and fisheries has fallen by one fifth but this sector still remains of vital importance to us and enables us to carry the burden of increasing trade with the development world. That is why, along with our Community partners, we have not been and are not prepared to take on new commitments and obligations or to dismiss rights which we have acquired and dearly paid for in the past.

We are, however, prepared to play our full part in the improvement of existing mechanisms and procedures in GATT including its traditional system of operation on the basis of conciliation, compromise and consensus and we call on all our international partners, including newly-industrialized countries, to reassess their rôle in the GATT and make a greater contribution towards an open trading system.

I consider it most important that we should jointly resolve to take account of each other's difficulties when we have in mind measures which might injure other countries and rather consult sincerely together so that any adverse effects may be minimized.

If we do not co-operate in this way there is real danger that unilateral actions and mutual recriminations will lead to a break-down in international trust. Genuine co-operation, on the other hand, will not only avoid the immediate danger of retaliatory trade measures but will help to pave the way for further economic development in the years ahead.

I would like to close by thanking you and congratulating you on the efficient manner in which you have conducted this debate and the important negotiations attendant upon it. I would also like to thank the Swiss authorities for the excellent hospitality and facilities provided.