

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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CONTRACTING PARTIES  
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REPRESENTING THE DELEGATION OF COLOMBIA

First of all I would like on behalf of the delegation of Colombia to express our sincere wish that this meeting, under your able chairmanship, will bear the fruits hoped for by international public opinion, especially in the developing countries.

It is very rare for the CONTRACTING PARTIES to be represented by those directly responsible for taking the decisions which govern world trade and economy. Their presence in this room corroborates the uncertainty faced by all our countries, whether developed or developing. The solutions to the crisis concerning the consequences of which we are all in agreement makes it essential that we should not let this opportunity slip by. Today more than ever we are realizing the vital importance of international trade, not only for the achievement of development but for its maintenance, and ultimately for the preservation of friendly and peaceful coexistence.

In attending this meeting, Colombia finds itself perplexed at the lack of solidarity on the part of the international community at this time of economic upheaval. There seems to be a feeling of "devil take the hindmost" at a time when a persistent recession is increasing poverty and unemployment, especially in the developing economies, in face of the prospect of the disappearance of growth from international statistics.

At the time when Colombia, as a developing country, decided to become a party to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, it did so in the conviction that it was becoming a member of a serious forum where the rules of the game were known and respected, but where in addition its specific interests would find, within the legal framework of GATT, the same security and consideration that was given to the rest of the member countries. Today, the Government of Colombia continues to hope that if confidence and credibility have been lost they will be reborn with the agreements arising out of the present meeting, and that if they still exist, they will be reinforced and given a boost. The situation facing our peoples cannot cope with the constant postponement by GATT of decisions and undertakings vital to the survival of our countries. We fear that this technical, pragmatic forum, eminently contractual in character, has become infected by the rhetoric and the lethargy of other international organizations. Using the argument that the world is in a terrible state of health economically, we have ignored the valuable tools available to the Agreement for achieving sound solutions, and we have diverted our attention towards

political questions, matters of no great importance or topics which should be dealt with in other forums.

This phenomenon has been even further aggravated by the merely partial application of many of the rules of the Agreement and the duality of procedures initiated on the basis on the outcome of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations, in virtue of which the GATT system does not apply generally.

In an atmosphere in which political will is lacking, my delegation would like to provide it and hopes that its contribution will help us to find in common the path towards progress with equity, in the absence of which, as pointed out by the President of Colombia, Belisario Betancur, there is no guarantee of world peace. The New International Economic Order must cease to be Utopian as it is at present, and become a strong, dynamic and inspiring reality, while taking care that the facts do not give the lie to commitments made.

In this context, it is essential to underline the significance of the concept of balance in regard to rights and obligations arising under the General Agreement. We must undertake to give according to our ability and to receive according to our needs. There is no longer room for the ideas of those who would place the developing countries on the same footing as the developed countries, since it is evident that the latter have a capacity for manoeuvre, for negotiation, and even for coercion, which is far greater than ours, and this makes them less vulnerable to the present phenomena. The wide gap that today separates the developed from the developing world implies, as I say, the notion of balance within a framework of equity. Those who can give more should give more, in the certainty that there will be a proper response from the developing world. This is the only way in which we shall be able to reach the ideal of social justice at international level and to achieve the goals set by GATT.

I am sure that those who have gone before me on this podium, and those who will come later, have paid due attention to the old chestnut of protectionism. The industrialized world with its exceedingly arrogant attitude towards the handling of matters of international economic co-operation must be made to realize that when it closes its doors to the developing world it prevents us from purchasing more by reducing our earnings. All the statistics on world trade point to the fact that the low rate of increase in trade has focused on the increase in demand for imports from developing countries. Trade among the developed countries is stagnant, and this will continue to be so until the revenue of the developing countries increases as a result of easier access to the developed markets and higher prices for our basic products. The fact is, that when we clamour for a real reactivation of international trade, we do it not merely for our own benefit but for the benefit of all the peoples of the world, since this is the way in which we shall cope with what might be called the spiral of recession. Nor should we in this context lose sight of the trend which has already overtaken other international economic bodies and which is now beginning to appear in GATT, namely the tendency to

become a forum where the main economic blocs of the developed world meet to debate their problems of the moment, brushing aside as matters of minor importance the perennial and still unsatisfied appeals of the developing world. I think I am speaking for all the developing nations in asserting that we are not disposed to sit back and listen to controversies alien to our interests.

The time has come to express a concern which goes beyond the sphere of trade and is more akin to the sociological concept of the world held in certain quarters. When the Governments of the developing countries decide to strengthen their tariff and para-tariff barriers, the entire international community assumes that these measures are being taken for the protection of their unemployed, their worried entrepreneurs or their electors contemplating a change in the political complexion of the nation. We all recognize that it is a praiseworthy goal. But if a developing country takes the same measures for the same reasons, it is regarded as irresponsible, "tropical" in outlook, ignorant of GATT and the Codes, to say nothing of subverting free trade. This again is inequitable: either we all protect or we all defend free trade and act accordingly, since in the opinion of my delegation it is difficult to understand why an unemployed person in Europe should be more important than one in Latin America, or why an undertaking in North America needs protection more than one in Africa.

Turning to concrete matters, my delegation regards it as vitally important to broaden the Generalized System of Preferences to include products of genuine interest to the developing countries. It should also be given an objective, transparent attitude and provided with the safeguards needed to prevent uncertainty in the productive sectors of the beneficiary countries. Negotiations are required for the liberalization of trade in "tropical products", defined as a priority item since the Tokyo Round, since while there is no doubt that GATT can show substantial results in terms of concessions, the latter are concentrated on manufactures in which the developing countries have little participation.

With regard to subsidies, we would like to join those who have expressed a serious concern about the subsidies granted wholesale by certain countries, outside the statutory orbit of GATT, to their exports, especially agricultural products - a practice which is strangling the economies of the developing countries, since it means a serious deterioration in the terms of trade.

The basic aim of this meeting must be to improve certain mechanisms of the Agreement in such a way as to achieve a higher degree of institutionalization of GATT. In this connection it is essential to adopt effective decisions in the matter of safeguards based on most-favoured-nation treatment, to the exclusion of any principle of selectivity and phasing. There must also be a strengthening of the procedure for the settlement of disputes to ensure that it is based on principles of justice, while giving special emphasis and independence to the conciliation arrangement.

This initiative is aimed, not as some people have argued at turning GATT into a tribunal without appeal, but at making it an Agreement in which commitments undertaken are properly honored.

In this same context, we are in favour of greater integration of the GATT system. Considerable difficulties have arisen from the need to apply the rules of the Agreement in certain instances and those of the codes in others, according as the latter are or are not applicable to a given country. In regard to this particular matter of accession to the codes, the situation is more and more contradictory. It is perhaps the only case in which multilateral instruments can be unilaterally limited in their applicability, as occurs with the code on subsidies and countervailing measures. This has led to a vicious circle which must be broken through in one way or another, since it is felt that there cannot be any clear-cut rules for accession to markets without adherence to the codes; but it frequently happens that it is less costly to be outside their sphere of application than to accede to their rules.

Finally, I would like briefly to make an appeal for the trade in textiles and clothing to preserve a proper sense of equity such as has not been achieved up to the present with the rules governing it. It is a reasonable demand on the part of the developing countries, and we hope that it will be met in full.

Such agreements and instruments as emerge from this meeting cannot be of less importance than the causes which have prompted us to meet at ministerial level. They must embody solutions and commitments representing a true advance in economic co-operation among the contracting parties. If this does not happen, we shall have missed another decisive opportunity, possibly the last one, and we shall have helped to rule out any possibility of improved well-being for our countries; we shall also have taken a further step towards the disappearance of hope itself.