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Speech delivered by Mr. J. Woulbrow, Delegate
of Luxembourg, at the Final Plenary Session

Mr. President, Gentlemen:

The representatives of almost sixty countries have met here and after four months of work will meet again tomorrow, in this majestic legislative palace in the Capital of Cuba, for the last time.

The Capitolio which has become familiar ground to us and was already a symbol of grandeur and liberty for the people of Cuba will tomorrow become a symbol of hope for the world.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment is nearing the end of its labours. Tomorrow, 24 March 1948, we shall sign the Final Act of the Charter of Trade and Employment. This historical document will henceforward be known as the Charter of Havana.

For the first time in the history of international relations, representatives of nearly all the peoples of the earth have come to an agreement on an international code covering numerous aspects of the economic life of humanity. For the first time a close knit system of rules has been set up to regulate international trade, to lower tariff barriers and restrict the obstacles to commerce between the nations, in order to facilitate the solution of the problems of reconstruction which face the countries devastated by war and in order to promote the economic development of the young countries.

Mr. President, Gentlemen:

We have been told that the Charter is not perfect. Canada's brilliant representative, Mr. Dana Wilgress, has deplored the fact that we have often drifted away from the great principles which should have been at the basis of the Charter. I share that opinion.

In order to achieve agreement we have admitted many exceptions, many departures from and attenuations of the ideals which we had undertaken to pursue.

/The economically

The economically under-developed countries wished a specific recognition of their right to adopt non-discriminatory measures contrary to the actual provisions of the Charter, in order to facilitate their economic development. They wanted the provisions of the Charter dealing with foreign investments to be formulated in such a way that the concept of their legitimate sovereignty in their own territory would be made irrefutably clear.

Mr. President:

I love America, I love Latin America, I love those new countries where everything is still possible. I understand and I sympathize with many of their claims.

But I do not think that the young countries have cause for complaint in the compromise which has been reached in the Charter.

The industrialized countries and above all the old industrial countries of Europe have their problems too. Their land is cultivated down to the last inch. They must import food to live. They must import raw materials for their industry. A possible economic crisis must affect them profoundly, because their soil cannot produce enough to feed their industrial population; the latter is reduced to unemployment and they are obliged to cut down their imports.

We feel that many concessions have been made to the young countries. We do not complain. We recognize that we ourselves have departed from the great ideals of the Charter in requesting, for example, the temporary maintenance of existing preferential systems. We accept the compromise solution. We are ready to recommend that our Governments adopt the Charter.

Mr. President:

The Charter is not perfect. It could not be perfect and I even wonder if it should have been perfect. We are living in a changing world. What is true today may well cease to be true tomorrow.

We have accepted a new principle, that of an international agency set up to regulate, in a friendly manner, by negotiations, the economic problems confronting the nations.

We have subscribed to certain great principles. We have affirmed the existence of an ideal, the development of the well-being of individuals and peoples, the development of international trade, the struggle to end the obstacles to commerce between the nations.

Whatever the imperfections of this Charter, the idea which we have planted will keep on growing. We have liberated a force. Already this force escapes and outstrips us. The idea carves out its own path. Reservations and restrictions will be swept aside one day, whether we wish it or not.

/The International

The International Trade Organization, the principle of which we are about to approve, will be integrated in the great system of agencies attached to the United Nations.

We are living in times that are troubled economically and politically. The very idea of the United Nations is often challenged, run down, sometimes even ridiculed. However, whatever the disappointments which await our generation, and perhaps later generations, the idea of the United Nations must also make its own way.

The little industrial countries to whom exports are almost everything, await with great hope the realities which will emerge from this Charter.

Luxembourg has long understood the need for economic co-operation between the nations. For more than twenty-five years Luxembourg has participated in the Belgo-Luxembourg economic union. The new customs union between the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg shows that whatever the practical difficulties, international economic problems can be amicably settled.

The delegation of Luxembourg believes that the difficulties which face the development of multilateral trade between all nations can also be overcome.

During the work of this Conference we have sometimes been tempted to give way to discouragement. Human ingenuity has overcome every difficulty. This same ingenuity will overcome future difficulties. Institutions are worth what the men who run them are worth - the men here have proved that they wanted to agree and have done so.

In spite of apparently insurmountable difficulties we have elected the Members of the Executive Committee of the Interim Commission of the ITO and the choice we have made now seems to us simple and wholly satisfactory. The Executive Committee has chosen a Chairman who is in himself a guarantee of the Organization's success. I refer to Mr. Dana Wilgress.

Mr. President:

We must not forget that already many of the principles of the Charter are being applied. Human ingenuity in all its subtlety has already been shown in the negotiations so recently concluded, the essential purpose of which was to ensure the progressive integration of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in the Charter on Trade and Employment. In spite of the difficulties, a certain number of Governments have succeeded in lowering their tariffs. This example will be followed.

Mr. President:

I do not want to leave this rostrum without in my turn paying a tribute to all those who have aided us in our task.

I want to pay a particular tribute to the admirable hospitality of the Cuban Government and people, a quality personified in the highest degree by our President, Mr. Sergio Clark.

/My thanks

My thanks must also go to that skilful diplomat, our Vice-President, Mr. Max Suetens, to the Executive Secretary and to all those others who have co-operated with us and helped us with all their skill and with all their hearts.

On behalf of the delegation of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg I also add my heartfelt good wishes for the success of the Charter of Havana.