

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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Committee on Trade and Development

CONSULTATIONS AND APPROPRIATE NEGOTIATIONS ON TROPICAL PRODUCTS

Report and summing-up by the Chairman

1. At the Ministerial Meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES in November 1982 a Decision was taken "to carry out, on the basis of the work programme pursued by the Committee on Trade and Development, consultations and appropriate negotiations aimed at further liberalization of trade in tropical products, including in their processed and semi-processed forms, and to review the progress achieved in eliminating or reducing existing obstacles to trade in tropical products." Pursuant to this, informal consultations were held from 7-11 November 1983 on the following groups of tropical products:

Tropical beverage items (coffee cocoa and tea);
Spices, flowers, plants, etc;
Certain oilseeds, vegetable oils and oilcakes;
Tobacco, rice and tropical roots;
Tropical fruits and nuts;
Tropical wood and rubber.

2. In the course of these consultations, developing country delegations emphasized the important role which exports of specific products covered by the consultations played in the economic development process of their respective countries, and expressed hope that prompt action could be taken with a view to increasing the access to markets for these products. Some of these countries stressed the importance of greater liberalization in trade in these products in the light of their current balance-of-payments difficulties.

3. Specific requests submitted by developing countries in accordance with the procedures adopted by the Committee on Trade and Development, as well as specific suggestions presented in the course of the informal consultations on tropical products in March 1982, were examined. A number of developing countries elaborated further on the tariff and non-tariff measures facing their exports of specific products and the reasons for their inclusion in the request lists. They felt that further liberalization was needed on an m.f.n. or GSP basis, as the case might be. Delegations of some developed countries indicated that certain requests had been received only shortly before the consultations and that their respective authorities required more time to examine them adequately. A number of developed countries also provided preliminary reactions to certain requests and offered further clarification on the nature of certain trade measures referred to in these requests as well as the reasons for their maintenance.

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4. Representatives from developed countries gave indications of recent trade liberalization measures including m.f.n. tariff reductions which favoured an increase in imports of specific products covered by the consultations. They drew attention to improvements made in their respective GSP schemes since the last informal consultations in March 1982. They further noted that requests involving m.f.n. concessions are normally handled within the context of formal negotiations.

5. With regard to future work under the Ministerial Decision on Trade in Tropical Products, the Chairman recalled that the Ministerial Decision gave the Committee on Trade and Development a mandate to carry out consultations and appropriate negotiations, and that the ultimate objective of the exercise should be to achieve further action in the direction of liberalization of trade in tropical products. The requests made by developing countries were noted and it was agreed that governments to which they were addressed would examine them further. It was understood that delegations could revert to these requests in the further work and that it would be open to developing countries to submit additional requests or modify existing ones.

6. Following the first discussion of the requests submitted so far, delegations of developed countries were invited to indicate at the earliest possible date their responses to the requests received. It was agreed that further consultations will be held before Easter 1984 to carry out a second reading of the requests made, to review the responses to them, and to determine how further progress including appropriate negotiations might be made. Delegations were invited, in the meantime, to intensify bilateral contacts so as to facilitate progress and to seek to identify concrete ways and means for achieving the desired objectives laid out by the Ministerial Decision.