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STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON
TRADE INFORMATION AND TRADE PROMOTION
ON THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE¹

The GATT's new International Trade Centre was set up in 1964 in response to the urgent need of the less-developed countries for assistance in expanding their exports. The Centre's major rôle in this regard was to provide market information for the new and old products of the emerging nations and advice in the techniques of export promotion.

From 15 to 18 February last I had the honour to be Chairman of a Group of Experts from both developing and developed countries who met to evaluate the work of the Centre since its founding in the summer of 1964, and to advise on what basis it might be continued. This was the second meeting of this Group. The first, from 3 to 5 February 1964, had indicated certain tasks the Centre might carry out in its initial stages, subject to review after a reasonable amount of experience had indicated what, in practice, it could constructively do.

After a rather rigorous examination of the Centre's performance in 1964 and the first six weeks of 1965, we are pleased to be able to report that it does adequately fill a deep and widespread need of the developing countries, many of whom have been calling upon it for assistance in various forms. The Centre has, in fact, been precipitated by them into a much more extensive programme at an earlier date than was foreseen. It was the opinion of the Expert Group that, despite the brief history of the Centre and its limited resources during the initial experimental period, it had carried out this accelerated programme in an excellent manner. One of the conclusions of the Group on the evidence was that, substantially, the programme it had recommended in 1964 should be continued, although with certain changes of emphasis and certain additions, about both of which I shall have more to say later.

¹ Statement made at the meeting of the Committee on 5 March 1965.
Reference: item(9) of the Committee's agenda COM.TD/W.8.

From the administrative point of view, it was earnestly recommended that to carry out such a programme, the Centre should be given proportionately more resources, especially of manpower, while still within the concept of gradual growth on the basis of demonstrable needs.

The work of the Centre up to now can be briefly summed up as: first, provision of market information to developing countries whether contracting parties or not; secondly, provision of a forum for discussion of trade problems by these nations in the form of the quarterly magazine called the International Trade FORUM, whose pages are also used to furnish them with advice on export promotion opportunities and techniques; thirdly, the preparation of pamphlets on matters of special utility to the developing countries in their export efforts; fourthly, building up of documentation on markets and trade practices; and fifthly, the securing of places in national export promotion courses for officials from developing countries. The Experts' detailed comments and recommendations have been laid before you in document L/2362. I shall, therefore, limit myself to highlighting some of the more important points that developed in the course of the meeting.

Basically, what the Experts advised was that, while the work of the Centre should continue to focus on the provision of information on export promotion by a variety of means, answers to enquiries for market information, promotional publications, etc., greater emphasis should be put on the arrangement of training facilities in marketing techniques and export promotion.

With regard to market information, the Experts stressed that, to be fully effective, the Centre must have adequate co-operation from national liaison agencies in the key matter of providing information about their own country's markets. The Group felt that the Centre's autonomous resources for carrying out direct research should also be augmented.

The Experts welcomed the Centre's initiative in following up an earlier recommendation of the first meeting of the Group by setting up a parallel liaison network with recognized private trade associations. The Group further recommended that the Centre should look into the question of employing market research agencies on behalf of developing countries with recourse to special financing, for example from technical assistance funds where possible.

With respect to the Centre's periodic publications, while expressing satisfaction with the International Trade FORUM magazine, the Experts felt that the Trade Opportunity and Commercial Policy Notes, currently appearing in it, could more advantageously be published separately at more frequent intervals.

The Centre's export pamphlet programme on matters of special utility to developing countries was to be encouraged; and the Centre's preparatory work on two of these was commended. They are: a manual on national export promotion techniques and a list of key trade association addresses in developed countries, which latter, it was suggested, should be developed to cover the developing countries as well.

A number of the Experts, from both developed and developing countries, attached considerable importance to training as a long-term measure necessary to equip key personnel who could, at the government level, undertake export promotion work; and at the private level, engage in effective export marketing.

The Centre has made a start by securing places in various national training courses in export promotion for officials from developing countries; this initiative has stimulated various other nations to organize such courses.

The Centre itself will provide a two-week seminar on export promotion as part of the GATT's twice yearly, in-service training programme for officials from less-developed countries. This latter might, incidentally, serve as a testing ground for the feasibility and desirability of the Centre conducting a more extensive course of its own, although not before 1966. In view of the underlying importance of training for the execution of all export promotion techniques, the Experts recommended that, in addition to co-ordinating and operating these various courses, the Centre should broadly examine the long-term training needs of the less-developed countries in the export field.

On the question of trade promotion at the actual marketing level, the Experts took the view that the Centre should, at this point, play a co-ordinating rôle in joint promotional efforts and co-operative market research on products of multi-national interest; as well as studying the trade fair market.

To sum up, the Experts approved the controlled expansion of the Centre's activities and resources in the light of the needs and desires of the less-developed countries and of the fact that the Centre has given concrete proof of its ability to serve them effectively.

I am happy to commend the report of the Expert Group to the Committee.