

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

COM.TD/C/W/5

24 November 1965

Limited Distribution

Committee on Trade and Development

Original: French

Working Group on International
Commodity Problems

STATEMENT MADE BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP
ON 24 NOVEMBER 1965 ON THE OCCASION OF THE
FIRST MEETING OF THE GROUP

I have pleasure in welcoming the distinguished representatives of the countries and organizations taking part in this first meeting of the Working Group on International Commodity Problems, established by the GATT Committee on Trade and Development.

I shall not remind you of the precise terms of reference which have been given to us. You know them as well as if not better than I do. They are set forth in the document distributed by the secretariat.¹

There is no need for me to expound to you the difficulties inherent in our task and the complexity of the problems before us. As you know, these problems are also under study in other international bodies and I am sure that we shall be able to benefit by their work. So far as I know however, no very practical results have yet emerged. In any case it does not appear that the developing countries can expect any decisions or realistic proposals in the immediate future to meet their development needs which are, alas, all too pressing.

I hold the conviction, which I believe most of you share, that in GATT we can arrive at sound proposals to meet the anxious expectations of certain developing countries whose export earnings depend almost exclusively on international trade in primary products.

These countries unfortunately do not have time to wait for a complete reversal change of attitudes and of certain principles which form the basis of trade between nations whose economies differ so greatly one from the other as those existing today.

¹COM.TD/C/1

The problem does not lie only in the enormous and widening gap between standards of living. It is not merely a matter of some nations being rich -- even extremely rich - while others are too poor. As Mr. Forthomme said one day, "the absolute problem is that some are at a level which is inadequate from the point of view of what we consider today as human dignity, that they are at a level which is inadequate having regard to the possibilities offered by properly applied techniques".

Time is short for those who are waiting, and if we are to propose sound solutions as rapidly as possible we shall have to try to strike a balance between the impulsion of the mind and compulsion of reality. We shall have to go beyond traditional theories and national egoism and show that we are capable of constructive imagination. That is not above either our intelligence or our competence, and I firmly hope that we shall succeed.

I know that all of us have many tasks to attend to, so that our time is precious. I therefore propose that we should begin by deciding on our programme of work at this first meeting.