

**GENERAL AGREEMENT
ON TARIFFS AND TRADE**

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ZIMBABWE

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Let me begin by mentioning this morning's landmark decision of the Preparatory Committee that will see the new World Trade Organization operating with effect from 1 January 1995. The birth of the WTO is indeed a historical moment marking the successful end of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations which were launched in Punta del Este nine years ago. WTO is emerging as the most appropriate framework for the creation of a trading system that will contribute significantly to dealing with the challenges of the new political and economic environment.

The session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES offers us an opportunity to review developments in the international economic and trading system. Since our last meeting, we note with concern the persistent unsatisfactory performance of most African economies. There has been little change in the Continent's decade-long trend of falling per capita output. Available data indicates that GDP grew by about 1.5 per cent in 1993. This is half the rate of the Continent's population growth and follows on even lower growth in 1992. On trade performance, the GATT Secretariat estimates that Africa's share in world merchandise exports in 1993 dropped to 2.4 per cent. This compares with a figure of 4.4 per cent a decade ago. What is of more concern is that prospects for this region remain poor, even given the modest improvement in non-fuel commodity prices expected this year and in 1995.

We fully recognise that the future of our economies is first and foremost our responsibility. In this regard, many of our countries, including my own, are going through fundamental economic reforms which are intended to build efficient and viable market driven economies. We appreciate the support and assistance that we have received in the implementation of these reforms.

With regard to the international economic environment, firm and sustained global growth will enhance the growth prospects of our economies. The recession in Western Europe in 1993 had a negative impact on our exports and thereby on our economic reform programmes. It is our hope that the WTO will bring with it sustained growth in the world economy which in turn will benefit our economies.

An increasingly important exogenous factor in the growth of most economies of sub-Saharan Africa is the weather. The 1992 drought was the worst in living memory but what is of greatest concern is that the overall trend in the weather pattern indicates a rise in the incidence and severity of droughts. Clearly this is a factor that warrants urgent attention on the part of our governments together with our development partners. As I speak there is a real threat of yet another drought in Southern Africa. If we do have a drought this year there is a real danger that our reform programmes could be derailed.

Allow me to make a few observations on developments in the GATT.

Over the past year, continued interest and participation in the multilateral trading system has been manifested by, among other developments, increased accessions and requests for observer status to the GATT and its related instruments. In keeping with the Ministerial decision on the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, a number of contracting parties have been reviewed. In this context, I am glad to mention that my country had its first trade policy review a few days ago. The review focused on our ongoing structural adjustment programme and we believe it assisted us in identifying those areas that still need our attention.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the fact that we view the coming into existence of the World Trade Organization with optimism as it is expected to result in a major confidence boost to world business and commerce. My country pledges its active participation in the new institution and looks forward to the other Members' cooperation in addressing some of the challenges I have mentioned as part of its trade agenda. It is our sincere hope that the WTO will remain non-discriminatory, equitable, transparent in its operations and will benefit all its membership - developed and developing, big or small.