

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

W.24/70

30 November 1967

Limited Distribution

CONTRACTING PARTIES
Twenty-Fourth Session

Original: English

REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES AND FUTURE PROGRAMME

Statement by Mr. H.R.P.A. Kotzenberg,
Secretary for Commerce of South Africa,
on 24 November 1967.

Though much has been achieved by the CONTRACTING PARTIES over the past twenty years, much remains to be done. In looking back to 1947 relatively few of the personalities who were active then are still with us, but no one can deny that the arrangements then decided upon, temporary though they were, were well made and the structure that has developed since then has proved to be very effective.

One of these personalities is our distinguished Director-General and I want to avail myself of this opportunity on behalf of South Africa to pay a very warm and sincere tribute to Eric Wyndham White. During all this period he has been a wise counsellor, an excellent director and a benevolent dictator and we would like to record our appreciation for his services. His extreme sensitivity to the aspirations and requirements of the contracting parties has again been demonstrated by the initiative he has now taken. He has sensed very accurately the growing feeling of frustration at the patent imbalance in the achievements of the GATT between industrial and agricultural products.

He has pointed out to us the tasks that must be undertaken. That these problems may be hard to resolve should not daunt us.

The fact that in the industrial field much has been done should not allow us to relax. Just as there are many stages of development amongst developing countries there are also different stages of achievement amongst developed countries. The distinguished Minister of Canada has stressed that the GATT organization is a flexible one. We agree and we believe flexible enough to take cognizance of the fact that what one country may be able to do another may not be able to do.

Agriculture remains a difficult problem for developed as well as for developing countries. We believe that by applying our minds to these problems progress can be made to the advantage of both exporting and importing countries. Failure to do so could have serious consequences for the GATT. We must, therefore, ensure that something constructive is achieved in the agricultural field in the context of the GATT organization.

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In so far as developing countries are concerned, no one here or in any other forum can but be impressed with the needs of these countries. Any methods of assistance that can be devised will be generally welcomed. South Africa will co-operate to the best of its ability and means.

In promising this co-operation and without in any way qualifying it, I feel constrained to point, however, that over the past twenty years the efforts of the CONTRACTING PARTIES have been directed to the elimination of preferences in international trade. Those endeavours have also been directed towards internationalizing trade on a most-favoured-nation basis.

In the GATT we seem to have come a full circle. We are now contemplating preferential treatment and we are propagating regionalism. Both these roads, whilst offering decided advantages, are full of pitfalls. We have of recent years become only too aware of what side effects regionalism can have on international trade. But South Africa believes that the barriers, tariff or non-tariff to products of special interest to developing countries should be minimized. South Africa sees, however, a very important barrier or obstacle facing developing countries, and that is the technological barrier. Even amongst the highly developed countries the technological abilities and achievements play a vital rôle - much more so is this the case with developing countries. The establishment of the Trade Centre, promising as the prospects are, is not enough and we would suggest that consideration should be given to broadening the scope of technical assistance to developing countries to assist them in overcoming the technological barriers not only in the field of marketing but also in the field of production and manufacturing. Here, too, South Africa is prepared within its means to co-operate to the fullest extent possible.

We now have received what may be considered the final draft on the principal item of our discussions at this the twenty-fourth session. Quite a number of contracting parties have not had adequate time to study it, nor have we yet had the benefit of the Director-General's introduction.

I foresee, Mr. Chairman, that the time available to the contracting parties to express specific views in this document will be limited and that all contracting parties may not get an opportunity to do so. It would therefore seem to me to be essential that provision be made for those contracting parties who do not get this opportunity to be permitted to put their views in writing for incorporation in the records.

Now too that we know who is going to be his successor I want to record our full support for this distinguished gentleman and to express our appreciation to the authorities concerned for their agreement to release him for this all important task in the interests of the GATT and the great task of this organization.