

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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Trade Negotiations Committee
of Developing Countries

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTH MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 1968

Chairman: Mr. M.G. Mathur

1. In opening the meeting the Chairman outlined the developments since the last meeting of the Committee on 12 September when it had been agreed that participating countries should enter into more intensive bilateral consultations, to be followed by further joint and bilateral consultations at governmental expert level in October. The purpose of these consultations was to enable governments to obtain from each other factual information on trade patterns, tariffs and other trade regulations necessary to establish and pursue requests for concessions on specific products and to make further exploration of the possibilities in respect of individual items. In accordance with this decision a series of bilateral and joint consultations took place beginning with a general meeting of experts on 14 October 1968; some eighteen delegations took part in this exercise. It ended on 25 October 1968 with a further general meeting at which governmental experts reviewed the progress achieved in the exchange of information and considered further steps to be taken to supplement and complete the first phase of the negotiations.

2. The Chairman went on to draw the attention of the Committee to the conclusion adopted by the CONTRACTING PARTIES at the twenty-fifth session in which the CONTRACTING PARTIES noted that the trade negotiations were likely to be completed by the end of the coming year and affirmed their intention to look at the result in a constructive and forward-looking spirit (L/3155 page 20). He emphasized the need for suitable planning of the further stages of the work of the Committee in the light of this objective. With this in view he invited the Committee to consider a number of substantive and procedural points raised at the meeting of governmental experts on 25 October and reflected in TN(LDC)13, i.e.

- (a) the setting up of an appropriate date for the submission of specific requests lists;
- (b) the organization of a further round of multilateral consultations; and
- (c) consideration by the Committee as to when the question of rules for the negotiations might appropriately be taken up.

I. Appropriate date for the submission of specific requests lists

3. In the course of the discussion on this subject the representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, India, Israel, Yugoslavia, Colombia, Spain, the United Arab Republic, Greece, Chile and Uruguay gave brief reviews of the stage reached in their consultations with other negotiating countries and in the preparation of requests lists. It was generally agreed that the consultations had served a very useful purpose in enabling delegations to exchange information on tariff structure, trade data and patterns of trade. It was also generally emphasized that in order that the Committee might meet the objective of concluding the negotiations and submitting the results to the next session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES for its consideration, it was necessary not only to accelerate the rhythm of its work but also to set up a definite timetable for completing the different stages of the negotiations. In this regard it was proposed that the Committee should move to the stage of submission of specific request lists in April to be followed some time later by the submission of offer lists after participating countries have had time to analyze the requests made to them. While some delegations stress the need for further bilateral consultations and exchange of information, members of the Committee generally supported this proposal.

4. The Committee agreed that specific requests lists should be filed by the 10 April 1969 and that in the context of this decision delegations should intensify and complete the process of bilateral consultations and exchange of information by the end of February or, at the very latest, by the middle of March. The hope was expressed that all participating countries would be able to adhere to the date of 10 April. Once specific lists were filed, participating countries could proceed to consider what offers they might make taking into consideration both the requests addressed to them directly and those addressed to the others. Similarly, countries making the requests could pursue these requests after taking into account those made by others. Specific dates for the filing of offers and for the conclusion of the substantive negotiations on the basis of these offers could be fixed at a later stage having regard to the overall calendar.

II. The organization of a further round of multilateral consultations

5. A number of representatives expressed the need for their delegations to continue with the bilateral consultations and exchange of information. While some delegations felt that a further meeting of experts would be useful, others felt that a multilateral meeting of experts should follow the submission of specific requests when it might be necessary for delegations to define their interests more clearly before replying to the requests.

6. It was concluded that in view of the pressure of time the most practicable approach was for each delegation to be sufficiently equipped and, where necessary, reinforced by experts from headquarters so that the exchange of information and bilateral consultations would be expediently and effectively carried out and completed within the period available for this phase of the exercise.

III. Consideration of rules governing the concessions

7. With regard to the question of establishing rules for the application of the concessions negotiated, certain participating countries, including Greece, Brazil and Uruguay, maintained that the question was fundamental to the whole exercise and should be considered as early as possible since in the absence of such rules they would find it difficult to assess the value and effects of the concessions that were being requested or offered. Other delegations expressed the view that the establishment of the rules should be approached from a pragmatic angle and should be taken up after the participating countries were in a position to define their interests clearly in terms of specific products and were in possession of the necessary information, which stage would be reached when specific requests lists had been filed. Some delegations reaffirmed that they were participating in the exercise on the assumption that the concessions would be exchanged on a preferential basis. Some delegations stated that in their view the application of concessions should be limited to participating countries.

8. It was also pointed out that, while members of the Committee would have to adopt certain rules on the basis of which participating countries could negotiate concessions, the results of the negotiations would need to be looked at by the CONTRACTING PARTIES as a whole before the concessions could come into effect. It was suggested by a representative that there may be advantage in getting some clearance in principle by CONTRACTING PARTIES of the rules before the participating countries proceeded to draw up arrangements between themselves. Others thought that it would be more in accord with the conclusions adopted by the CONTRACTING PARTIES and also make for quicker action if, after agreeing on the basic rules amongst themselves, the participating countries presented the results of the negotiations to the CONTRACTING PARTIES in the expectation that they would be looked at in the spirit of the declaration adopted at the twenty-fifth session.

9. In the light of the exchange of views, it was agreed that the Committee should take up the preliminary consideration of the rules as soon as the process of exchange of information was completed and that agreement should be reached within the Committee on the main element in the rules after the request lists had been filed but before the offers were defined.