

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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ASEAN: STATEMENT AT THE MEETING OF THE GATT CONTRACTING  
PARTIES AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL, 15-19 SEPTEMBER 1986,  
PUNTA DEL ESTE, URUGUAY

1. Let me on behalf of the ASEAN contracting parties to GATT, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, extend our congratulations on your election as Chairman. We are confident that under your able leadership and guidance, this difficult yet significantly important meeting will be successfully concluded. The ASEAN countries would also like to express our Government's appreciation to the people and Government of Uruguay for hosting their meeting.
2. ASEAN is a regional grouping of six developing countries with large trading interests. According to statistics obtained from the GATT secretariat, the ASEAN countries accounted for US\$137 billion or 3.5 per cent of the world trade last year. Of this, imports accounted for 3.2 per cent or US\$64 billion and exports were 3.8 per cent or US\$73 billion. We play an important rôle in international trade and we recognize the important stake we have in the international trading system. Presently five of the ASEAN countries are already contracting parties to the GATT. ASEAN has and will continue to contribute to the strengthening and developing of the multilateral trading system.
3. As free market economies, the ASEAN countries, with a total population of some 300 million, offer tremendous opportunities to our trading partners. In fact, we import a wide range of manufactured items, particularly capital goods and equipment which are needed for our various development projects. Our chief suppliers are the industrialized countries.
4. ASEAN exports comprise primary commodities, semi-manufactured and manufactured products. Most of those are destined for the markets of the industrialized countries. Hence the economic well-being and export earnings of the ASEAN countries depend to a large extent on the market access afforded by these industrialized countries. In recent years, while the global economic slowdown has reduced the ASEAN countries' export earnings, the more serious impediments encountered by our exports are the ever-increasing protectionist and trade-distorting measures employed particularly by our major industrialized trading partners. There has been a proliferation of various grey-area measures; recourse to bilateralism and sectoralization, and increased use of subsidies which restrict and distort trade. More efficient and lower-cost-producing countries, such as ASEAN, have been penalized for their comparative advantage. These trends must be halted and reversed.

5. The ASEAN countries wish to point out an important trading link, which is frequently overlooked. The capacity of ASEAN to continue importing depends on its ability to continue exporting.

6. The various protectionist measures imposed on ASEAN exports have undoubtedly hampered ASEAN efforts to push ahead with the growth and development of our economies. That is why the ASEAN countries have consistently supported the call for a new round of multilateral trade negotiations, with a view to revitalizing the floundering multilateral trading system. We hope that through those negotiations, much of the stresses and strains which have built up in the multilateral trading system will be relieved and the economic growth of every country mutually bolstered and reinforced. Therefore, the ASEAN countries are present here today to participate in and to contribute to a successful launching of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations.

7. The New Round is important to ASEAN. In our view, the New Round should achieve the objectives of greater liberalization and increase in world trade; reduction in and elimination of protectionism and trade-distorting measures; an increase in market access, particularly for developing countries; and increased confidence in the international trading system under GATT.

8. To achieve these objectives and to ensure a meaningful and successful New Round, confidence-building measures at the commencement of the negotiations are essential. The concepts of the standstill and rollback of protectionist measures should be implemented on the launching of the New Round. These commitments must be firm, credible and fully implemented. There must be adequate multilateral surveillance of these commitments, and an effective mechanism established for the purpose.

9. Like many other countries present at this meeting, the ASEAN countries share the view that the negotiations should be conducted in a transparent manner and consistent with the principles of the General Agreement so as to ensure mutual advantage and increased benefits to all participants. At the same time, we wish to reaffirm that the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries is an integral part of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In this connection, the ASEAN countries wish to reiterate the importance of the strict and full application of the special and differential treatment to all developing countries throughout the negotiations.

10. The ASEAN countries have actively participated in and contributed to the preparatory process for this meeting, both through the formal channel of the Preparatory Committee and in the several informal consultations. In fact, ASEAN has contributed towards the preparation of one of the texts of the three draft Declarations before us today. We note that of the three drafts, that submitted by Colombia and Switzerland, namely PREP.COM(86)W/47/Rev.2, includes most of the issues of interest to contracting parties. However, it also has some shortcomings. Issues of

critical concern to ASEAN, such as tropical products and agriculture, have not been satisfactorily dealt with. Nonetheless, the ASEAN countries are of the view that this text, PREP.COM(86)W/47/Rev.2, can form a basis for our discussion and further work at this meeting.

11. Tropical products have always been an issue of importance and priority to ASEAN. ASEAN wishes to see the final Declaration provide for the establishment of a special negotiating group on tropical products, so as to facilitate early conclusion and immediate implementation of the results of the negotiations. We would also like to see trade in agriculture, particularly export subsidies affecting world trade, dealt with meaningfully and comprehensively.

12. Moreover, ASEAN does not wish to see any linkage made between concessions offered in the traditional issues with concessions offered for some other issues that may be agreed upon.

13. The ASEAN countries wish to reiterate our desire to see this Ministerial meeting of CONTRACTING PARTIES at Punta del Este launch the new round of multilateral trade negotiations. We also wish to emphasize the need for expeditious commencement of the actual negotiations and their early conclusion, not later than four years from the date of the launch of the New Round. Toward this end, the early establishment of an effective trade negotiations committee is vital. ASEAN also stresses the need for all results of the negotiations to be brought before the CONTRACTING PARTIES with the view to taking decisions regarding their formal endorsement, implementation and incorporation into the GATT.

14. The ASEAN countries have actively contributed to the preparatory process. We will continue to participate actively in the proceedings of this meeting so as to contribute to the work that remains to be done to resolve the outstanding issues. ASEAN will also participate actively in the negotiations that will follow in the years ahead. ASEAN hopes that all contracting parties share this same spirit and sense of mission. We urge all present at this meeting, particularly the industrialized countries, to exert their maximum efforts to improve the international trading system, and to ensure the success of the new round of multilateral trade negotiations.