

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

SR.42/ST/38
22 December 1986

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CONTRACTING PARTIES
Forty-Second Session

Original: English

PHILIPPINES

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Ambassador, Permanent Representative

The launching of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations demonstrated that with the requisite will, contracting parties can overcome divergent trade interests and priorities and direct the course of the multilateral trading system into the twenty-first century. The issues discussed had seemed insurmountable, but with intensive preparations and imaginative approaches, it proved possible to construct, by consensus, a framework for developing a more open, viable and durable multilateral trading system.

The Philippines is under no illusion that the work ahead will be easy. The organizational arrangements for the negotiations have not been completed, nor a mechanism for monitoring observance of the standstill and rollback commitments established. The initial consideration of proposed negotiating plans has already disclosed technical divergences in approaches. We respect the views and preoccupations of participants on these matters. We recognize the right of all participants to put forward their ideas. After all, the GATT is concerned with the "market place", and it is a healthy sign that all ideas be given equal opportunities for discussion and deliberation.

We believe that the considerations, be they technical or not, in respect of the organizational arrangements should not be unduly stretched or treated paramount over the spirit of Punta del Este. The chances of back-sliding are high. For a developing country like the Philippines, easily vulnerable to adverse external trade developments, we cannot afford ruptures in the trading system. Completion of the organizational requirements for the negotiations this year will give a clear signal to all sectors that serious negotiations are underway early next year and that the spirit of Punta del Este will continue to animate the forthcoming negotiations. More importantly, it will reinforce the respectability of the GATT as the trade institution where problems are capable of solutions and where differences can be resolved.

The launching of the Uruguay Round has generated expectations. We, however, beg to differ with any insinuation that those expectations are ambitious. The Ministerial Declaration was the product of time-consuming deliberations and discussions. Participants had to accommodate the views and concerns of one another. Each participant knew what the objectives were when the Declaration was adopted. We believe that the level of ambition of the Uruguay Round is not unduly high. Thus, we should not attempt to address the negotiations in terms of second-best solutions.

There are many obstacles to be addressed, but we believe that these obstacles, though daunting, are capable of satisfactory solutions.

The first approximation of the contents of a negotiating plan on tropical products has already disclosed disquieting notions of treatment of this sector. Technical considerations regarding the definition of tropical products appear to suggest an approach not consistent with the Ministerial Declaration. Ideas from certain quarters suggesting insoluble technical problems on this matter do not induce confidence, despite the intensive preparations in the aftermath of the Tokyo Round, and the conclusions and resolutions adopted in GATT as far back as 1963. We stress that the technicalities of the negotiations in this sector should not nullify the objective of full liberalization. Negotiations should recognize the importance of this sector to many less-developed contracting parties and should give effect to the agreement that these shall receive special attention, including the timing and early implementation of the results.

We also expect that other topics for negotiations, such as agriculture, natural resource-based products, as well as systems-issues like safeguards and dispute settlement, would be treated vigorously and expeditiously. One of the considerations in our interest on dispute settlement arises from the fact that when disputes between or among the major players are not resolved, the fall-out for small countries could be considerable.

The general principles governing negotiations as set out in the 1986 Ministerial Declaration accommodate the particular requirements and difficulties of less-developed contracting parties. We believe that these principles in regard of the less-developed contracting parties should permeate all the topics for negotiations. It may be difficult to envisage special treatment in certain areas where rules have not been established, but possible specific new commitments in those areas should provide for acceptable degrees of flexibility in favour of the less-developed contracting parties.

Mr. Chairman, I join previous speakers in thanking you, on behalf of my delegation, for your leadership and contribution to GATT. My delegation also extends its thanks to the Director-General and his staff. The assistance provided by the Technical Co-operation Division has, in particular, been very helpful and we hope that this assistance will continue.