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NIGERIA

Statement by H.E. Mr. E.A. Azikiwe Ambassador, Permanent Representative

This Forty-Fifth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES provides us an excellent opportunity to deliberate on the work of GATT and its accomplishments. As we meet here again today, there appears to be consensus on the analysis of the international economic situation and the willingness by all trading partners to work towards sustained growth in the world economy.

GATT has no doubt become the most important institution in the control and the regulation of the international trading system. The multilateral approach in GATT serves the interests of all participants especially the small trading countries. To maintain its credibility, however, GATT must recognize the interests of all contracting parties and establish a just and equitable balance of rights and obligations.

Our experience in GATT has convinced us of its positive rôle in international trade. We have to strengthen the multilateral rules and discipline and its ability to develop a legal framework of international trade. The maintenance of a pragmatic multilateral mechanism for reconciliation and dispute settlement is essential for continued faith in the functioning of the GATT system. An enforceable dispute settlement mechanism will discourage the increasing resort to unilateralism and protectionism which are detrimental to our work in GATT. At the same time, GATT must not be used as an instrument to oppress the weak.

Looking over the past year, one may say that there have been some positive developments here and there. GATT, however, must show sufficient concern about the less-developed contracting parties. It must not do anything that will stifle the development objectives of these contracting parties. Those instruments which allow the developing countries some leverage in dealing with their adverse economic situation must not be eroded, but rather strengthened. GATT cannot continue to behave like the proverbial ostrich in continuing to ignore the importance of the linkage between trade, finance and debt. Failure to recognize this linkage is tantamount to a refusal to recognize the legitimate difficulties of many developing countries which constitute a large proportion of contracting parties.

The developing countries are watching helplessly the continued deterioration of their economies. Commodities that once sustained the economies of these countries have lost their international market value to

the extent that their continued production may not be worth the labour. The irony is that as prices of commodities continue to fall, the prices of manufactured products from developed countries continue to rise and the debt of developing countries continues to increase. This scenario calls to question the fairness in a world of fair and free trade.

Nigeria believes in free trade. We are committed to the promotion of free trade. In spite of our economic difficulties, we have continued to press ahead with self-imposed discipline in the structural adjustment program. We believe that this sustained effort of autonomous liberalization of our trade régime deserves meaningful recognition and appropriate response from our trading partners.

The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations has made significant progress after the mid-term review a year ago. We, however, note that equal attention has not been given to the areas that are of interest to the developing countries. We would like to see the principle of non-discrimination applied to all the negotiating sectors. The conduct of negotiations itself should give the assurance that the final agreement will reflect a balance of benefits for all participants. We expect an acceptable agreement to incorporate, as an integral part, all developmental elements, and not merely relegate them to the preamble.

We note with satisfaction that during the year, GATT has instituted the Trade Policy Review Mechanism as a permanent feature to replace the twice-yearly review of developments in the international trading system. The response GATT has given to the concerns of some contracting parties is commendable. We urge all contracting parties to show sincerity in dealing with issues that affect other contracting parties. Such sincerity on issues before the GATT will indeed prove, and reassure all contracting parties of, the workability of the multilateral trading system.

Let us use this occasion of the Forty-Fifth Session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to rekindle our faith and our hope in GATT.