

**MULTILATERAL TRADE
NEGOTIATIONS
THE URUGUAY ROUND**

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Trade Negotiations Committee
Meeting at Ministerial Level
Montreal, (Canada), December 1988

Address by the Honourable John Crosbie,
Minister for International Trade of Canada
at the opening session of the Ministerial Meeting

I would like to add my welcome to that of the Prime Minister.

A mon avis, Montréal est la ville idéale pour tenir cette réunion, car c'est¹ l'un des grands centres du commerce international en Amérique du Nord.

Canada's trade strategy has two tracks: firstly, the implementation of a comprehensive bilateral free trade agreement with our largest trading partner, the United States; at the same time we are vigorously pursuing trade liberalization with all our trading partners in the multilateral trade negotiations under the GATT.

Over the forty-one years of the GATT's history, Canada has always supported the institution as the cornerstone of a strong multilateral trading system providing a framework for economic growth and development.

Our commitment is as strong today as it was then.

For example, we negotiated the Free Trade Agreement with the United States under Article XXIV of the General Agreement.

Not only is the Free Trade Agreement consistent with the spirit and the letter of the General Agreement, we believe it will act as a catalyst to efforts in the current round of multilateral trade negotiations.

It does this by eliminating all tariffs and by reducing non-tariff barriers in the largest bilateral trading relationship in the world. It also extends rules into new areas of economic activity.

This adds up to liberalizing a sizeable portion of global trade.

A little over two years ago, in Punta del Este, Uruguay, the world was facing strong pressures for protectionist action.

¹(spoken in French): I think Montreal, as one of the major centres of international trade in North America, is the ideal city for holding this Meeting.

As a result of that meeting, the decision was taken to launch the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, the most ambitious and complex trade negotiations ever undertaken.

Today, we meet in Montreal at the mid point of the schedule we set for ourselves. The protectionist pressures are certainly still evident, but they are now set against the background of progressive efforts in the Uruguay Round to come to grips with the major problems contributing to these protectionist forces.

We have made important and significant progress in the Uruguay Round over the last two years.

We have identified comprehensive negotiating plans, we have seen hundreds of negotiating proposals put forward by individual countries and groups of countries, and we have identified more clearly areas of convergence and divergence in issues under negotiation.

Over the past months our delegations have worked intensely to narrow differences in the whole range of issues under negotiation.

Although tangible progress has been made in some areas, it is clear that important differences of view remain in others.

However, this process of negotiation has, in itself, clearly advances the work of the Uruguay Round.

In that regard, the Montreal Ministerial Meeting has already had a positive impact on the world trading system.

I see our task here in Montreal as comprising three interrelated components.

First, ministers should, as called for in the Punta del Este Declaration, use this occasion to take stock of development in the Uruguay Round.

Second, Ministers should take decisions, where appropriate, to implement certain results which have emerged from the first two years of negotiations.

Third, Ministers should provide clear direction to negotiators that will assist in overcoming major outstanding differences and will lead to the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round on time, by the end of 1990.

We should not underestimate the effort and commitment that will be required to complete these tasks over the next few days.

The global trading community is watching developments this week in Montreal with great interest. They will be examining carefully the signals that they receive from this meeting.

For the private sector, a stable multilateral trading system is vital to their ability to plan and invest.

Another of our objectives this week, therefore, should be to reassure the global business community that we, representing the Governments of all the participants in the Uruguay Round, recognize the problems affecting international trade relations and are prepared to come to grips with them in a direct and balanced manner.

My hope would be that, as a result of our work this week, I will be in a position to report to you at the final session of this Montreal Ministerial Meeting that the GATT is alive and well, is adjusting to the reality and complexity of the world trading system and that we are firmly committed to achieving the objectives we set for ourselves in the Punta del Este Declaration.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to the former chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee, Mr. Enrique Iglesias.

The success of the meeting in Punta del Este in September 1986 was, in large part, due to the strong leadership provided by Mr. Iglesias at that time.

Mr. Iglesias has subsequently moved on to take up responsibilities as President of the Interamerican Development Bank. However, he maintains his strong interest in the Uruguay Round.

I am delighted now to call him to make a few brief comments to this meeting.