

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON

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TARIFFS AND TRADE

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TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT

Statement by the Delegation of Colombia

We intend to be brief and confine ourselves to the specific theme of this Council, namely environmental conservation measures and international trade.

First of all, we should like to thank Ambassador Ricupero for the broad and transparent consultations he has conducted on this sensitive issue of how to reconcile the concern to take legitimate action to protect and preserve the environment with the interest we all share in preserving a free international trading environment.

We are particularly grateful for the contribution made to the discussion by the Chairman of the CONTRACTING PARTIES in giving us a discussion outline that will certainly serve to structure our debate.

As we have said on earlier occasions, environmental conservation is a goal to which my Government attaches priority when drawing up policy. It is internationally recognized that Colombia is one of the Earth's biggest and most important remaining reserves of bio-diversity.

In addition, we are well aware that it is through the ecologically rational exploitation of our natural resources as well as dynamic and increasing participation in international trade that we will achieve our targets of sustained growth within a pattern of sustainable development.

The relationship between trade and the environment is inherently a complex one.

In taking up this issue here, we must be careful not to spill over into areas better dealt with by other forums. In giving it concrete shape, first in an agenda for discussion and subsequently in terms of reference for studying it, we have to be precise.

As may be seen from the discussions we have held in this chamber in the past, it is a relationship that can be approached from different standpoints. Consequently, and because we are all part of a single multilateral system, we should like the issue to receive consistent treatment in the various forums in which it is currently being discussed; primarily here and in the preparatory process for the World Conference on Environment and Development, but likewise in all other forums where the trade-environment nexus is affected in one way or another.

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We believe that one must begin at the beginning. We must begin studying the existing international agreements that affect trade in goods and/or services for legitimate purposes of environmental conservation. We must begin exploring how the growth of trade liberalisation is affecting the environment. Before taking action, we must understand the degree of compatibility between the use of existing technology and the shared priorities of environmental conservation and free trade; we must join in the ongoing discussion on which economic tools are appropriate for tackling the problems of the globalization and cross-border movement of environmental degradation, whether through restrictive measures or subsidies established in order to "internalize" the environmental externalities in the production and marketing of goods and service. To summarize, we must educate ourselves through an institutionalized process before we act.

We could right now take procedural decisions on the creation of a working group or the revision of the group set up in 1971, and on the terms of reference or membership of the group: however, on what principles would we base our discussion?

Reference has been made to the acceptability of environmental measures under the criterion of "least possible trade damage". Is this a principle that properly reconciles the shared responsibility for global environmental issues and the national sovereignty of states? And in the case of environmental conservation measures that affect the export of key products for a specific region's subsistence and development, how should we treat them so as to avoid a deterioration in conditions of poverty which will subsequently have a worse impact on the environment?

We think we should proceed by stages. The first stage is to begin working immediately on an information base that takes account of the Rio Conference discussions.

We therefore urge the secretariat to submit, as quickly as possible, the study described in the ASEAN proposal (document L/6859).

We think it is desirable that the consultations should continue so that, until we arrive at global solutions in the discussions and the UNCED produces its results, GATT may, on the basis of the legal instruments currently at our disposal, face up to the threats to free trade under the pretext of "protection of the environment".