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LDC/M/101

29 December 1971

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GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INFORMAL GROUP OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 1971

Prepared by the Secretariat

1. A meeting of the Informal Group of Developing Countries in GATT was held on 16 December 1971, under the Chairmanship of H.E. Mr. C.H. Archibald, Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago. The meeting was attended by the representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, India, Israel, Jamaica, Korea, Malaysia, Nigeria, Peru, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey and Yugoslavia.
2. The purpose of the meeting was (a) to review the results of the twenty-seventh session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES and future programme of work; and (b) to consider the appointment of a new Chairman of the Informal Group.

Twenty-seventh GATT session

3. Members of the Group generally agreed that some positive results had emerged from the twenty-seventh session with respect to certain points of interest to developing countries. Among them was the Decision by the CONTRACTING PARTIES authorizing the implementation of the Protocol relating to the trade negotiations among developing countries. They also welcomed the continued existence of the Group of Three to ensure follow-up action on its Report and to make suggestions aimed at facilitating the implementation of Part IV of the General Agreement. A number of delegations announced that, after having received document L/3641, their governments had been in a position to withdraw their reservations on the summing up by the Chairman at the session. They, however, expressed the hope that the procedure followed on this occasion would not constitute a precedent for future GATT sessions.

Organization of work of the Committee on Trade and Development and its subsidiary bodies

4. Speaking at the request of the Chairman, Mr. M.G. Mathur, Assistant Director-General, said that the secretariat background paper INT(71)133 listed points of special interest to developing countries emerging from the recent GATT session. The secretariat had already given some thought to the practical steps that might be taken to follow up some of these recommendations. As regards the country studies recommended by the Group of Three, the secretariat intended to see how statistical data on trade flows might be organized so as to lend themselves most suitably to an examination of tariff and non-tariff barriers and of the trade problems involved. With respect to further action on tropical products, it was hoped that following informal contacts with delegations, some suggestions on the question of the proposed multilateral consultations concerning vegetable oilseeds and oils could be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on Trade and Development provisionally scheduled for early February 1972. The Group on Residual Restrictions had been convened for

24-25 January so as to make it possible to have its report available for consideration by the Committee. The Group on Adjustment Assistance would also be meeting in the course of February to examine the material furnished by developed contracting parties in response to the enlarged questionnaire established by the Export Group last May.

Report of the Group of Three

5. Several members regretted that it had not been possible to obtain firm decisions in regard to the implementation of several of the recommendations contained in the report of the Group of Three. Developing countries should, however, continue to press for action on these recommendations with determination in the coming year.

Action on non-tariff barriers

6. The Group expressed the hope that those developing countries which had not yet been in a position to participate actively in the negotiations would find it possible to accede to these arrangements in the near future. Several members observed that although the Protocol relating to the trade negotiations among developing countries made reference to non-tariff barriers, the Decision by the CONTRACTING PARTIES provided only for exceptions from Article I of the General Agreement. They pointed out that the aim of these negotiations was broader and the restricted nature of the Decision might affect future possibilities to expand these arrangements. In this context it was proposed that an expert group, similar to the Ad Hoc Group on the Expansion of Trade Among Developing Countries set up in 1965 by the Committee on Trade and Development, should be established with a view to examining problems involved in negotiations covering quantitative restrictions and other non-tariff barriers. The ad hoc group might in addition examine how priority treatment might be given by developed countries to developing countries in the removal of quantitative restrictions and other non-tariff barriers, if necessary on a preferential basis, pending the commencement of general and multilateral negotiations of such barriers. A suggestion was also made that the group might consider whether in this context any special measures need be adopted for the least developed among developing countries. It was agreed that the proposal for the establishment of the group should be examined in greater detail at the next meeting of the Informal Group.

7. In response to a request for information on non-tariff barriers affecting trade among developing countries, Mr. Mathur recalled that the Ad Hoc Group on the Expansion of Trade Among Developing Countries had in 1965-66 considered a number of proposals relating to the treatment of non-tariff barriers between developing countries. The secretariat had in that context prepared certain background material to facilitate discussion of the matter and this could be made available to the Informal Group if desired.

Article XIX

8. A member of the Group recalled that his delegation had proposed that emergency measures applied on imports of particular products under Article XIX could be prejudicial to the export interests of developing countries and that imports from developing countries should be exempted whenever such measures were resorted to. This matter had been discussed on several occasions in the past. His delegation was aware that the proposal involved certain legal difficulties but he nevertheless appealed to developing countries to give further consideration to this matter and lend their full support to the proposal at the next meeting of the Committee on Trade and Development.

Action within the Informal Group

9. Members stressed the need for concerted action within the Informal Group which should be used increasingly for the purpose of preparing concrete proposals for submission to the CONTRACTING PARTIES. Such proposals could relate for instance to action to be taken on individual products in pursuance of the provisions of Part IV. It was also suggested that the Group should examine what may be done to get the concept of preferential treatment for developing countries in such fields as non-tariff barriers accepted by the CONTRACTING PARTIES, that cases of discriminatory treatment affecting developing countries should be examined and the principle of non-reciprocity should be taken up for further scrutiny. It was also felt that developing countries should be in a position to participate in all GATT consultations.

Election of Chairman

10. To replace Ambassador Archibald who had been appointed Chairman of the GATT Council of Representatives, the Informal Group unanimously elected Mr. Peter S. Lai, Permanent Representative of Malaysia, as its new Chairman.

11. Members of the Group expressed their appreciation to Ambassador Archibald for his very able chairmanship and for the devoted and effective contribution he had made to the work of the Group during his tenure. They were sure that in his new capacity as Chairman of the Council, his particular abilities and experience would be of the greatest value from the point of view of developing countries.