

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INFORMAL GROUP OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HELD ON 6 APRIL 1971

Prepared by the Secretariat

1. A meeting of the Informal Group of Developing Countries in GATT was held on 6 April 1971 under the chairmanship of Mr. Peter Stephen Lai, Permanent Representative of Malaysia. The meeting was attended by the representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Ceylon, Chile, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba, Gabon, Greece, India, Israel, Jamaica, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Republic, Uruguay and Yugoslavia.
2. The Chairman said that the purpose of the meeting was to exchange views on how to make the most of the opportunities that the informal meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES to be held from 28 to 30 April would provide. He recalled that the Council, at its meeting on 22 February 1971, had agreed that the meeting should cover, (a) review of the current situation in international trade and (b) review of the work programme, paying particular attention to the trade problems of developing countries and having in mind the forthcoming twenty-seventh session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES in November 1971; that the meeting should be organized so that sessions would be held in the mornings, and in the afternoons if necessary, but that adequate time should also be reserved for informal contacts between delegations; and that contracting parties should be represented at an appropriate senior level and, where possible, by officials from capitals responsible for trade policy matters. He added that a preliminary report of the Group of Three might also be available at the time of the meeting. He invited the Director-General to address the Informal Group on the question of the organization of work of the April meeting.
3. The Director-General said that contracting parties were aware of the circumstances which had led to the decision to hold an informal meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES in April. As there would be no records, the informal session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES should provide an opportunity for delegations to have a free and frank exchange of views on all matters of interest. While the meeting would be dealing with the current situation in international trade and the totality of work programme of GATT, discussions would naturally also be directed to the specific problems of developing countries in the light of the work carried out by the Agriculture Committee, the Committee on Trade in Industrial Products and the findings of the Group of Three. Further, the informal session would be considered as a preparatory meeting for the official session of the CONTRACTING PARTIES in November.
4. As for the organization of work at the informal meeting, it appeared that a flexible attitude should be adopted regarding the scheduling of meetings. As the session would last for only three days, plenary sessions and discussions might be held in the mornings with the afternoons reserved for group discussions or consultations

as required. The statements by delegations should if possible concentrate on specific problems to which they attached importance and one single statement might cover all the issues involved. The Director-General reiterated that the informal meeting presented an excellent opportunity for government officials responsible for trade policy to have an informal exchange of views on matters at a time when an era of mutations in the field of international trade was about to open.

5. On behalf of the Group of Three, Mr. Besa (Chile) said that the Group was established by the Committee on Trade and Development to review the specific problems of concern to developing countries. The Group had been working for five weeks without interruption, and had held consultations with developed countries maintaining restrictions on imports of products of interest to developing countries. It was felt that, in the first stage of the Group's work, efforts should be concentrated on a study of specific cases. Bilateral consultations with developed countries had been completed and, in view of the necessity to make available a first report in time for the informal April meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES, it had not yet been possible to deal with certain questions in greater depth. The Group would however revert to these questions at a later date. The difficulties met in the consultations concerning restrictions on imports or differential duties were considerable and at the present stage of the work one could not expect spectacular results. In his view the procedure followed had proved very useful and the Group would continue to review certain particular problems and to keep up the pressure with a view to obtaining concrete results. The report of the Group of Three was under preparation and it was his hope that it could be made available to delegations a few days before the opening of the informal meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.

6. All the representatives who spoke hoped that the report of the Group of Three would be made available to the delegations well in advance of the April meeting so that it could be studied in capitals. Mr. Besa said that every effort would be made to have the report available to delegations as early as feasible. He also pointed out that the report was to be submitted to the Committee on Trade and Development.

7. Some representatives felt that the informal meeting in April should be planned so that one day might be allocated for each of the reports of the Group of Three, the Agriculture Committee and the Committee on Trade in Industrial Products. It would be appropriate if the texts of the statements made would be distributed so that the delegations' position vis-à-vis various matters could remain on record. The aim of the meeting should be to give an impetus to the work being carried out in various bodies of GATT with particular reference to the urgent problems of developing countries. A further meeting of the Informal Group should be held as soon as the report of the Group of Three was available, so that the delegations could have an opportunity to discuss it with a view to harmonizing their views.

8. In response to a number of points raised, the Director-General said that it would not be advisable to allocate one day for a separate discussion of each item because being interrelated they might not lend themselves to be dealt with in isolation. As regards the level of representation at the meeting, the indications so far received suggested that a number of contracting parties would be represented by either the director-general for foreign trade or by permanent secretaries of the Ministries concerned. Delegations were free to get in touch with the secretariat for advance information on the level of representation of a particular country.