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Speech by Mr. Benjamin Cohen, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
at the Opening of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment

Allow me, at the very outset, to convey to Your Excellency, as well as to their Excellencies, the President of the Legislative Chambers and the Members of your Cabinet, the sincere appreciation of the United Nations for the great honour you do me with your attendance at this inaugural meeting.

Prevented by the unexpected extension of the work of the General Assembly, now meeting in New York, of personally attending this Conference under the auspices of the United Nations, which he considers of the most far reaching importance, the Secretary-General, Mr. Trygve Lie, has asked me to represent him and to convey to you his deep regrets at not being able to come here as he had wished to do.

He has also requested me to transmit his sincere thanks to the Government of Cuba, without whose co-operation it would not have been possible to call this notable assembly in the beautiful city of Havana, together with his high appreciation of the excellent work which the Commission, appointed by the Cuban Foreign Office, has done in preparing the Conference as well as of the cordial hospitality now being tendered to us by the people and authorities of this Republic.

In few fields of the vast task outlined by the San Francisco Charter can the United Nations make a more immediate contribution to the improvement of international relations and of the economic life of the various peoples than in that of international trade. Article 55 of the Charter provides that the United Nations, in order to further peaceful and friendly relations among nations shall promote the establishment of high standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development. At its very first session in 1946, the Economic and Social Council established a Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Trade and Employment, which met first in London and then in Geneva and

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whose endeavours attained the most complete success. It has now called together this Conference to study the draft Charter prepared by this Committee, looking towards the establishment of an international trade Organization.

In the years following the first world war we saw the development of a rapid and ominous trend towards national economic isolationism, and in favour of constantly higher barriers to international trade. Positive efforts were made through the League of Nations to arrest this trend by international action. The World Economic Conference of 1927, the Tariff Trade Conference of 1930 and 1931, the International Monetary and Economic Conference of 1933 bear witness to those efforts and to the utter failure with which they were attended.

The end of the recent world war provided a better opportunity to carry on the work. It was seized by the United Nations and a new approach to the problem was adopted with results which are immensely gratifying and encouraging. The draft charter which is before you reflects this new approach; and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade recently concluded in Geneva - an agreement unprecedented in its technique as well as in its scope - points to what may be accomplished in this field.

You meet at a time when the economy of the world is tragically disrupted by the effects of a war of unparalleled destructiveness. You cannot be expected to devise solutions for all the ensuing maladjustments, many of the most urgent of which are being attacked elsewhere, through the economic organs of the United Nations, the Specialized Agencies, and by the governments directly concerned.

Your task is to look beyond such immediate distortions and to chart a course for what we pray will be a brighter future, and to establish a code of conduct which nations will accept as a guide for their commercial policies in a united effort to make the best use of the world's resources for the common welfare. You are asked to make a solemn pledge to direct the efforts of all your countries to the pursuit by international co-operation of rising standards of employment, production and consumption.

It is not possible to underestimate the difficulties of your task! The immediate distortions and stresses of the world are not your direct concern. But they are so acute that they will be an ever-present factor in your discussions and must be taken into account in the drafting of the measures for bringing the ITO Charter into effect. Your great contribution in this field is to ensure that the measures which are forced upon governments in periods of abnormal economic stress like the present shall not become a permanent feature of the peace economy. We have had one bitter

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costly lesson of what this means. This Conference and the effect which is hereafter given to its decisions will show whether we have learnt that lesson.

The document which this Conference will prepare must be so drafted as to fit the needs of a great diversity of states with wide variety of economic and political circumstances and in different stages of economic development. It is here that the Report of the Preparatory Committee gives cause for optimism. The diverse conditions which exist in the many countries present here were reflected in the composition of the Preparatory Committee itself. Its members were deliberately chosen by the Economic and Social Council to include a variety of geographical areas, a variety of types of economy, and a variety of political and economic philosophies. Thus the main issues which confront this Conference have been submitted to a most exhaustive debate which all of you have had an opportunity to follow. The debate has now produced the draft which is before you. We feel encouraged, therefore, to hope that broad areas of agreement can be found in this Conference.

The world is weary, perplexed and still haunted by fear. You can send forth a message from here which will revive flagging spirits and bring fresh hope.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, Mr. Trygve Lie, I wish you the fullest measure of successful achievement in your important work.

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