

**GENERAL AGREEMENT  
ON TARIFFS AND TRADE**

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**CONTRACTING PARTIES**  
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**SINGAPORE**

**Statement by H.E. Mr. K. Kesavapany**  
**Ambassador, Permanent Representative**  
**Chairman of the WTO General Council**

In keeping with this historic occasion a large number of delegations have requested me to make a collective statement on their behalf. I also wish to speak in my capacity as Chairman of the WTO General Council.

About two score and ten years ago, the Community of Nations attempted to bring forth into this world an institution to facilitate the free flow of trade and commerce.

Unfortunately, as the circumstances were not propitious, this bold goal was not realised. Instead, an agreement known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or affectionately called the GATT, was agreed upon.

Meant to be a temporary arrangement, GATT however established itself as a prominent feature in the international landscape and made its presence felt in the world of trade and commerce.

Through successive rounds of negotiations, the barriers obstructing the free flow of trade were slowly and steadily lowered. Rules were drawn up to facilitate this process. A mechanism was established to adjudicate on trade disputes among the CONTRACTING PARTIES. A whole corpus of jurisprudence on trade matters evolved under the aegis of GATT.

In 1986, GATT launched the most comprehensive round of trade liberalization known as the Uruguay Round. The Round was launched in the full knowledge that its culmination would mean the end of GATT and the birth of a new organization called the World Trade Organization. However, the Community of Nations did not flinch from taking this decision. Instead, the inevitable march of history was recognized. The need for GATT to metamorphise itself, if it wanted to remain relevant to the needs of a changing, globalized economy was acknowledged.

As a result, today we have a vibrant institution which is poised to play an increasingly important role in the international arena. This, in a large measure, is due to the strong foundation of GATT, upon which the WTO has been designed and built. So, in a sense, GATT will never disappear. It will live on in the shape of WTO and take pride in the achievement of its offspring, just as a mother revels in the success of her children.

At this poignant moment, it is appropriate that we pay tribute to the successive generations of our leaders who guided the GATT wisely and well. To all of them the CONTRACTING PARTIES owe a large debt of gratitude for looking after GATT over the past five decades.

We are indebted to all the Directors-General of GATT for their contributions to the cause of free trade, as espoused by GATT. Without their dedicated leadership, the institution governing world trade would not be in the healthy state that it is today.

We are also happy that just as GATT has evolved into the WTO, the GATT Secretariat has evolved into the WTO Secretariat. Transition is never easy. But with goodwill and cooperation all round, I am confident that this can be achieved in a smooth and meaningful way.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like, on behalf of all contracting parties, to thank you and your colleague Ambassador Wade Armstrong, Chairman of the GATT Council, for the leadership you have shown over the past twelve months. As we salute the passage of GATT into the pages of history, you will be remembered as the men who helped this to be done with so much dignity and sense of purpose.

Yesterday Ambassador Armstrong made an eloquent statement at the final meeting of the GATT Council.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that his statement, together with your own words, be entered into the record of this meeting.

As Chairman of the WTO General Council, I am personally grateful to you and Ambassador Armstrong for the cooperation extended to me in bringing about a smooth transition from GATT to the WTO.

May I call on all Members to join me in noting this moment in the history of our GATT/WTO institution and in expressing our appreciation to the Chair.

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<sup>1</sup>C/M/278.