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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Statement by H.E. Mr. Lyle E. Williams
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

This happy coincidence of the 40th Anniversary of GATT with our Forty-Third Session of CONTRACTING PARTIES and with the initial phase of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations has indeed given us the opportunity to reflect during the past three days on GATT, its evolution, its peculiarities, its shortcomings and its achievements. The year 1987 is indeed a significant one in the history of GATT and in the evolution of the international trading system.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has always viewed with the greatest importance its membership in GATT and has over the years regarded the organization as being vital for ensuring the conduct of international trade in a disciplined and equitable manner.

We continue to have faith in GATT and firmly believe that the experience, knowledge and wisdom amassed over the years by the organization could serve it in good stead over the next forty years.

We feel, however, that there is a need to guard against GATT being hijacked by the major developed countries.

We also remain chagrined at the increasing number of activities that take place outside of GATT in flagrant violation of GATT provisions.

We have in the past seen how the insistence on narrow national interests by major trading nations, and the imposition by them of measures often in violation of the spirit and letter of GATT and almost always with indifference to the consequences of such actions on small fragile economies, have severely affected the trading prospects of many developing countries, including my own.

We feel it imperative, therefore, that serious consideration be given and concerted action be taken to strengthen the GATT, and that thereafter, the political will and co-operation of nations must be directed to eliminating violations of its regulations. We shudder on contemplating the consequences of a continuing recourse to bilateralism, protectionism and managed trade on the one hand, and the non-observance of GATT's provisions on the other.

We are also conscious of the considerable uncertainties which plague the international trading environment, where exchange rate instability, high interest rates, depressed commodity prices, inflation, unprecedented debt-servicing obligations, unemployment, etc. have all had negative and disastrous effects on the products traded by developing countries and on the economic and social well-being of our peoples.

Trinidad and Tobago is a small island developing country, highly susceptible to the vagaries of the international economic environment. Like so many other developing countries, we are faced with the pressing necessity to increase and diversify our exports and to gain access to markets. But Trinidad and Tobago has experienced deep and painful effects of protectionism, as some of our principal products have been subjected to anti-dumping and countervailing duties making those products uncompetitive in markets that were secured with great cost, effort and difficulty.

The Trinidad and Tobago delegation therefore joins the call for an immediate application of the standstill and rollback provisions of the Punta del Este Declaration.

My delegation supports the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations and remains convinced that the round represents an opportunity to halt the drift towards disorder that now characterizes international trade. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation, therefore, joins other delegations in lauding the progress so far achieved in the initial phase of the negotiations.

One of the objectives of the negotiations as contained in the Punta del Este Declaration is "to bring about liberalization and expansion of world trade to benefit all countries, especially less-developed contracting parties".

The general principles governing the negotiations also recognize that these negotiations - which would be conducted in order to ensure "mutual advantage and increased benefits to all participants" - would not require less-developed contracting parties "to make contributions which are inconsistent with their individual development, trade and financial needs".

The Uruguay Round must bring concrete benefits not only to the advanced economies and major trading partners but also to the smaller countries and to the developing world.

We continue to fear, however, that developing countries like Trinidad and Tobago will find themselves saddled with decisions of far-reaching future effect and significance with which they will be unable to live and which may very well threaten fundamental national interests.

How can this be avoided? The obvious answer is by participating in the negotiations and, by so doing, ensuring that our national interests are considered.

But this is easier said than done, particularly in new areas such as services. The inequality in the technical competence and expertise under the ready and accessible control of the major developed countries and the relative lack of this expertise to the extent required by countries like Trinidad and Tobago will ensure that the negotiations are conducted among unequal partners.

Trinidad and Tobago, while fully conscious of its responsibility as a sovereign country to promote and further its own national interests, finds itself greatly disadvantaged. We cannot help but feel that the mood and approach which have so far characterized the negotiations have been solely influenced by considerations of self-interest and by the philosophy of "Each man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost". In our naïveté we see something wrong with this, and in spite of the realization that in the final analysis, our national laws and sovereignty will prevail, we do not consider this conducive to negotiating in good faith.

We therefore welcome the approach of the Government of Canada and other nations that seek to provide some form of technical assistance geared towards the acquisition of this expertise for those nations which require it. However, as laudable as this proposal is, as beneficial and productive as it could prove, and as effective as developing countries can be in promoting their interests, all will be to no avail if there remains a lack of commitment and will on the part of the developed countries to honour the mandate of the Punta del Este Declaration which makes it incumbent upon participants in the Uruguay Round of negotiations to work towards the mutual interests of all countries, developed and developing alike.

In conclusion, the Trinidad and Tobago delegation wishes to pay tribute to the CONTRACTING PARTIES Chairman on his meritorious performance during the past year. We also wish to take the opportunity to commend the Director-General and the Secretariat for their efficiency, competence and understanding which continue to be evident in the handling of their onerous responsibility.