

Negotiating Group on Trade Facilitation

SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Held in the Centre William Rappard
on 30 April and 1 May 2007

Chairman: H.E. Mr. Eduardo Ernesto Sperisen-Yurt (Guatemala)

1. The Chairman recalled that the proposed agenda for the meeting had been circulated in WTO/AIR/3003 and that the purpose of the session mainly aimed at furthering the negotiating process by offering an additional opportunity to advance the Group's discussions by tabling new contributions and reacting to the proposals previously received. Furthermore, Members would be invited to admit relevant international organizations, including the IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, WCO and the World Bank, to attend the next meeting of the Group on an ad hoc basis, as in the past.
2. The agenda was adopted.
- A. CONTRIBUTIONS ON THE AGREED AGENDA OF THE NEGOTIATING GROUP
3. The Chairman said that the first item took Members straight to the heart of the negotiating business in inviting further contributions on the agreed agenda of the Negotiating Group (NG). Members would be familiar with the matter as it had been the established basis of their work.
4. In organizational terms, he wished to stick to the traditional process of keeping the debate as interactive as possible by letting most of the discussions take place in informal mode, limiting formal elements to the introduction of new proposals and statements Members explicitly requested to make for the record. He equally wished to maintain the custom of first looking at the implementation proposals before turning to the ones on the GATT Articles and the customs cooperation side.
5. At the same time, he saw little value in merely repeating the process of addressing the contributions in identical form. At the recent meeting of the TNC, DG Lamy had made clear that there was need for more engagement and an intensification of the negotiating efforts towards a time horizon pointing to the end of the year.
6. For that to happen, it was necessary for Members to pick up the pace and intensify their work. They had already agreed in Hong Kong on the necessity of "mov[ing] into focussed drafting mode [.....] so as to allow for a timely conclusion of text-based negotiations on all aspects of the mandate". Good progress had been made since then in moving to third generation proposals. But what was needed now was to move into the next phase of focussing the negotiations on these proposals so as to generate draft texts.
7. That was why he urged Members to intensify their efforts. All delegations knew that there was still a significant amount of work ahead of them with time not being on their side.

8. What he therefore wished to propose was to make the discussions as focussed and text-oriented as possible and to concentrate on the open questions at hand. While room would certainly be accorded to look at all proposals on each element of the mandate, he would like Members to focus on those contributions that had attracted relatively little attention so far. The airgram already alluded to relevant compilation headings in that regard.

9. The remaining part of the discussions under this agenda item took place in informal mode with the exception of the following statements that were requested to be placed on record:

10. The representative of Honduras thanked UNCTAD for the experts that had come to visit Honduras from 5-15 February 2007. The purpose of the mission had been two-fold. On the one hand, the initiative aimed at getting a better understanding of the situation regarding Trade Facilitation in the country. On the other hand, it sought to establish the basis which would enable a national group to follow the negotiations, assess the needs and the changes required in the area of Trade Facilitation and to continue working on an analysis of the proposals presented to the NG. Honduras wished to express its gratitude to UNCTAD and its staff for the work they had done, especially for the recommendations made, and hoped to be able to continue to count on the support of this organization and to work together in order to have a professional follow-up to that mission.

11. The representative of Nigeria said that it would be a burden on some delegations to participate in technical meetings of Negotiating Group in the absence of experts from the capital. Therefore, Nigeria continued to urge that every effort be made to facilitate the participation of customs officials from the respective capitals in order to be able to enhance and deepen their understanding of the issues at stake and for them to be able to appreciate the fact that there was need for collaboration even at the national level between agencies responsible for customs matters. Nigeria would be thankful if such participation could be achieved.

12. The representative of Switzerland wished to take the opportunity to remind delegations and participating international organizations that an informal technical workshop would take place in the afternoon on measures aimed at expediting the movement of goods. The workshop would take place in room D and all Members were invited to attend.

13. The Negotiating Group took note of the statements made.

B. AD HOC ATTENDANCE OF RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, WCO AND THE WORLD BANK, AT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE NEGOTIATING GROUP

14. The Chairman suggested inviting relevant international organizations, including the IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, WCO and the World Bank to attend the next formal meeting of the NG on an ad hoc basis, as provided for in the Work Plan.

15. It was so agreed.

C. OTHER BUSINESS

16. The Chairman addressed the issue of the Negotiating Group's next meeting. He recalled the dates mentioned at the end of the last session. On that basis, he proposed to hold the next session on 7 and 8 June.

17. It was so agreed.

18. The Negotiating Group took note of the statements made.
 19. The meeting was adjourned.
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