

Negotiating Group on Trade Facilitation

SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Held in the Centre William Rappard
on 12-13 March 2007

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

1. The Chairman expressed his pleasure to assume his function as the Negotiating Group's new Chair. He recalled that the proposed agenda for the meeting had been circulated in WTO/AIR/2970 and that the main purpose of the session was to continue the established negotiating process by providing delegations with another opportunity to advance the agenda of the Group, both in terms of offering new input and reacting to the contributions 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 under the first item, delegations were invited to contribute on the Group's agenda as contained in the Work Plan. They would recall the agreement on it covering all elements of the negotiating mandate, with work proceeding on the basis of Members' contributions and other input that the Negotiating Group (NG) might request. He understood that his predecessors had paid great attention to the Member-driven nature of this body and its inclusive way of operation, and wanted to take the opportunity to assure delegations of that being his philosophy as well. He was also a firm believer in the merits of a bottom-up procedure in the NGTF and was aware of that having been one of the keys to its success.
4. Another aspect he would like to continue was the pragmatic, results-oriented approach of the Group. He saw great value in maintaining its flexible and inter-active mode of operation with little emphasis on procedure and a maximum of effort towards enabling a frank and substantive debate.
5. A few new contributions had been received that he would like to take up at the beginning of the meeting before then turning to the earlier presented ones for another round of debate. In discussing those papers, it was proposed to stick to the previously applied approach where the introduction of new submissions would be formal whereas their discussion would take place in informal mode. That would allow Members to freely raise questions and obtain clarification at the unofficial level when discussing those contributions for the first time. This was the way the Group had been proceeding in the past with positive results. The informal exchange would then be followed by a formal one, providing Members with an opportunity to present statements they wished to make for the record, both with respect to new submissions and the proposals previously received.

6. Another tradition he wished to continue was the emphasis on the issues of technical assistance and S&D. For that reason, he suggested that contributions on this area be taken up first. After that, the NG would address the GATT Article-related submissions that had been prepared for the meeting. Time would also be accorded to input from the participating international organizations.

7. The remaining part of the discussions under this agenda item took place in informal mode, with the exception of the following interventions:

8. The representative of Korea introduced a revised version of the proposal on establishing a Single Window (TN/TF/W/138/Rev.1), expressing his appreciation to Singapore and Thailand for their continued co-sponsorship. He then briefly highlighted the changes compared to the earlier version of the document.

9. In the first bullet, the earlier third-generation proposal had been slightly modified in response to the feedback from various delegations by deleting the words "*establish or designate a single entry point*", maintaining the part suggesting that "*Members shall provide for the 'single window'*". Korea was of the view that a Single Window could be established in many places. There could be a couple of windows; a couple of agencies could function as a Single Window so that traders could provide their documents or submit the data only one time with the Single Window then undertaking their onward distribution to all the relevant authorities or agencies.

10. The representative of Korea presented a revised version of his delegation's proposal on release time of goods (TN/TF/W/139/Rev.1). Comments had been received on the earlier version by Australia, the United States and Canada relating to the question of how to measure release time of goods. The previous proposal had suggested that this should be done on the basis of the WCO Time Release Study. However, some countries had raised questions about this, and, as a result, Korea now proposed to revise the proposal in bullet point 1, speaking of "*using tools such as the WCO Time Release Study*" instead.

11. The reason for the change was to make clear that it was not the intention to compare release times between countries. Rather, the idea was merely to secure transparency of average release times. It was further suggested to publish those release times. The proposal called for Members to expeditiously reduce their respective times and make advances in increasing the efficiency of the administration process.

12. Moving back into formal mode, the Chairman asked whether any delegation wished to make a statement for the record.

13. There were no requests.

14. 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

15. 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.

16. It was so agreed.

C. OTHER BUSINESS

17. The Chairman raised the issue of the Group's next meeting. Consultations with the Secretariat on available meeting facilities had shown for there to be a slot on 30 April and 1 May. Following that, the Group could meet on 7 and 8 June, and on 16 and 18 July.

18. The representative of Switzerland observed that there had been parallel meetings in the WCO and wondered whether it would be possible for NGTF meetings not to take place at the same time, and whether one could explore the possibilities with the WCO for having back-to back meetings. If capital-based people had already come to Brussels, it would be relatively easy to come to Geneva immediately afterwards.

19. The Chairman replied that efforts would be made to take that into account.

20. The representative of Ecuador wondered whether 1 May was not a holiday. It was labour day, which meant that there could be problems with their counterparts back in the capital. Perhaps one could review the dates. For Ecuador, it could be complicated.

21. The Chairman said that consultations would be held on the available dates.

22. The representative of Japan said that while 1 May was not a holiday in Japan, 30 April was. Japan also had holidays on 3 and 4 May. That week was known as "Golden Week" in Japan with almost everyone except Government officials being on holiday. It was very difficult to get a flight out of Tokyo that week. Notwithstanding the fact that Japan was eager to participate, it might not be able to get a flight out of Tokyo to Geneva.

23. The Chairman said that the schedule was very complicated. Every effort would be made to reconsider the suggested dates within existing limitations but the options were very limited. He would nevertheless consult on the matter and inform Members as soon as possible about the most appropriate dates.

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

25. The meeting was adjourned.
