

**PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

Proposal Concerning the Negotiations on Agriculture

Paragraph 9(a)(ii) of the Geneva Ministerial Declaration

*Communication from Cuba*

The following communication, dated 9 November 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Cuba.

**Introduction**

1. According to Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture, the WTO Member countries are committed to continuing the liberalization process through negotiations aimed at reducing or eliminating elements that impede international trade in this sector.
2. The fundamental basis for this process must be the provisions of the Agreement on Agriculture, concluded during the Uruguay Round. The basic objective of the process must be to refine this legal instrument with a view to achieving greater transparency in the market and ensuring harmony between the commitments to be fulfilled and the benefits to be derived.
3. It must be stressed that in implementing the commitments set forth in the Agreement on Agriculture as well as those deriving from the forthcoming negotiations in this sector, it is essential that we consider the economic, commercial and financial level of each country, with due attention to the needs of the developing countries, in particular the net food-importers, in the light of the social upheaval that could result from the abrupt changes that may be demanded by this liberalization process.

**Proposals**

The Ministers recognize that the following elements are fundamental and must be taken into account in the negotiations on agriculture.

*Tariffication*

4. The consequence of this process has been to create prohibitive tariffs for certain agricultural products. The new tariff reduction commitments must aim above all at reducing those tariffs which reach the end of the implementation period with the highest rate, i.e. at contributing to the elimination of tariff peaks.
5. All non-tariff barriers must be converted into tariffs.

6. Tariff escalation must be eliminated in the developed countries so that the developing countries can diversify and increase their share in the export of processed agricultural goods.

*Market access*

7. The Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries must be applied effectively; in other words, real access for the products from those countries to the markets of the developed countries must be improved.

8. The special safeguard provisions should not be applied to products which are of interest to the developing countries.

9. The use of environmental standards must be limited, and it should be made clear that such standards must be restricted to strictly scientific criteria.

10. The establishment of quality standards, labelling and packaging must not contribute to the differentiation of products from the developed and the developing countries, marginalizing products from the developing economies and reducing their chances of integration in international trade.

*Domestic support*

11. Granting flexibility in the fulfilment of the agricultural provisions to countries that are victims of natural disasters, and permitting the temporary application of domestic support measures aimed at reactivating national production.

12. Considering the discrepancy in the levels of domestic support between the developed countries and the developing countries, the latter should be granted facilities which guarantee flexibility in complying with the stipulated requirements in the implementation period, and special and differential treatment for developing economies should be intensified in the context of the forthcoming negotiations. In this connection, it would be useful to introduce the concept of a "box for development" for government subsidies intended for that purpose.

*Technical assistance*

13. The agricultural sector constitutes one of the most important and in some cases the only significant means of access for the developing countries. It is therefore vital that they should receive technical assistance from the WTO, together with other international organizations, in developing a technical advice programme which would enable them to fulfil their Uruguay Round commitments and to have an idea of what is to come in the forthcoming negotiations. This advice would also be aimed at ensuring that these economies can effectively benefit from the process.

-----