

GATT/WTO CHRONOLOGY

1947 The birth of GATT. On 30 October 1947, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed by 23 nations - 12 developed and 11 developing economies - at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The Agreement contained tariff concessions agreed to during the first multilateral trade negotiations and a set of rules designed to prevent these concessions from being frustrated by restrictive trade measures.

The genesis of GATT. In 1946, the newly-created Economic and Social Council of the United Nations called a conference to consider the creation of the International Trade Organization (ITO) which was envisaged as the final leg of a triad of post-War economic agencies (the other two were the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development - later the World Bank). A preparatory committee was established to draft the ITO charter.

During 1946-1947, the committee worked on the draft charter. However, independent of this official task under the UN mandate, the committee members conducted tariff-cutting negotiations among themselves in advance of the ITO. These negotiations resulted in about 45,000 tariff concessions affecting some US\$10 billion of world trade.

The committee members also agreed to protect the value of the tariff concessions by early acceptance of some of the trade rules of the draft ITO charter. Thus, tariff concessions and trade rules together became known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which was signed on 30 October 1947 by 23 countries as an interim measure.

In November 1947, delegations from 56 countries met in Havana, Cuba, to consider the ITO draft as a whole. After long and difficult negotiations, some 53 countries signed the Final Act authenticating the text of the Havana Charter in March 1948. There was no commitment, however, from governments to ratification and, in the end, the ITO was stillborn, leaving GATT as the only international instrument governing the conduct of world trade.

1948 Entry into force. On 1 January 1948, GATT entered into force. The 23 founding members were: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Chile, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, France, India, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Southern Rhodesia, Syria, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States.

The first real business of the GATT was conducted by the First Session of Contracting Parties which began on 28 February 1948 and ended on 20 March 1948 in Havana, Cuba. The secretariat of the Interim Commission for the ITO, which served as the ad hoc secretariat of GATT, moved from Lake Placid, New York, to Geneva in 1948.