

successful launch of such a group could not be achieved. We wanted to ensure that the efforts of such a group would not just lead to another report full of good ideas. We wanted one which would mobilize governments to action. The discussions in the context of that proposal as well as in other forums such as the Wheat Exporters' Ministerial meetings, the OECD and elsewhere have, however, served to advance the international debate.

The current international picture in agriculture is certainly gloomy. I would like to be able to affirm that we are now emerging from the proverbial tunnel, but I fear that such an unqualified expression of confidence could be misunderstood. I would be the last to deny that there are hopeful signs for the future. Indeed, we are doing all we can, together with our trading partners, to bring about a more rational environment for agricultural trade. We are urging on our trading partners the need for decisions to ease the current trading tensions in the near future. But we also need to attack some of the root causes of the crisis we find ourselves in. We see the GATT negotiations as being a useful tool to restore the health of the international agricultural trading system for decades to come.

Those negotiations are now formally launched. More importantly, with respect to agriculture, we secured an undertaking to liberalize agricultural trade and to "bring all measures affecting import access and export competition under strengthened and more operationally effective GATT rules and disciplines". In effect, what emerged from the Punta del Este meeting was a commitment by all of the GATT countries to find ways to make the GATT more effective and more workable. The result should be a more predictable and secure environment for international trade, where competition will no longer depend only on the resources of a country's Treasury. When compared to the negotiating mandates of previous rounds of GATT negotiations, it is clear that the Punta Declaration is the most forward-looking that we have ever achieved. If the promise of the Declaration is kept, we can look forward to seeing a reasonable agricultural trading framework emerge.

Delegations in Geneva have now agreed on more detailed negotiating plans for each of the subjects under negotiation. That agreement, which was reached a few weeks ago, marks another step forward in the arduous negotiation process. With much of the procedural aspects of the negotiations now resolved, substantive deliberations can begin. While progress may not look spectacular, it should be considered against the backdrop of the Tokyo Round, when it took essentially two years to resolve procedural aspects.