

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

G/L/216

5 December 1997

(97-5336)

REPORT (1997) OF THE COMMITTEE OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE EXPANSION OF TRADE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS

1. The Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products, hereinafter referred to as the Committee, was established pursuant to the provisions of the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products (WT/MIN(96)/16), hereafter referred to as the Ministerial Declaration, and the Implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products (G/L/160), in order to carry out the provisions of paragraphs 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the Annex to the Declaration.

2. The Committee has held three formal meetings in 1997: on 29 September, 30 October, and 3 December. The minutes of these meetings are contained in documents G/IT/M/1 to G/IT/M/3. It was agreed that Mr. A. Hoda (Deputy Director General) would serve as Chairman of the Committee until such time as the Committee took a formal decision on the issue of the chairmanship.

3. Membership in the Committee is open to representatives of all participants. At its meeting of 30 October 1997, the Committee adopted rules of procedure which provide for observer status in the Committee to WTO Members which are not participants to the Ministerial Declaration and Governments that are observers to the Council for Trade in Goods. Furthermore, requests for observer status by international intergovernmental organizations will be considered on a case-by-case basis. At this meeting, it was also decided that the World Customs Organization (WCO) would be granted observer status to meetings where the issues of HS classification and HS amendments were included in the agenda.

4. During its first two meetings, the Committee discussed and took decisions, where necessary, on organizational matters in particular on chairmanship, rules of procedure, observership, document distribution, and document derestriction.

5. The Committee has also reviewed the status of implementation, a summary of which is provided in document G/IT/1 and its revisions. It was noted that most participants had submitted the formal documentation for rectification and modification of their WTO schedules in order to incorporate the commitments arising from the Ministerial Declaration, and that others who had not done so, had indicated the documentation would be forthcoming. It was further noted that participants which were in the process of acceding to the WTO were implementing the commitments on an autonomous basis.

6. Pursuant to the provisions of the Ministerial Declaration, the Committee met prior to 30 September 1997 to consider the issue of divergences in classifying information technology products. The Committee took note of document G/IT/2 and its corrigendum and addendum, which provide an overview of the divergences in classification of Attachment B items, and agreed to continue work on this issue.

7. The Committee took note of the timeframe of 1 October to 31 December 1997 for participants to submit lists of additional information technology products for possible additional tariff concessions. Many participants indicated that work was ongoing on this matter, and noted that their lists would be forthcoming.

8. Other work of the Committee during its first three meetings concerned the future work programme. Participants stated their interest in examining non-tariff measures, specifically mentioning standards and import licensing, and matters related to the procedures to address the concerns of small- and medium-sized exporting participants regarding their rights under Article XXVIII. In regard to the coverage of products as contained in the Ministerial Declaration, it was further agreed that a survey would be conducted among the participants on their use of mandatory technical regulations, mandatory conformity assessment procedures, and in addition their application with respect to the two specific standards, namely IEC 950 and CISPR 22.

9. The Committee took note of the interest expressed by Latvia and Panama to become participants to the Ministerial Declaration.