

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

G/L/420
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(00-5232)

REPORT (2000) 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 provisions for 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 four formal meetings in 2000: on 21 March, 14 June, 3 October¹, and 22 November. The minutes of these meetings are contained in documents G/IT/M/21 to G/IT/M/24². Mr. Y. Shiran (Israel) served as Chairman of the Committee until June 2000, when Ms. E. Chelliah (Singapore) was elected Chairwoman of the Committee for 2000.

3. During the past year, the Committee approved the draft schedules of commitments submitted by Cyprus, Jordan, Oman, and Slovenia. Thus, these countries became participants to the Ministerial Declaration, bringing the total number of participants to fifty-five. Membership in the Committee is open to representatives of all participants. The Committee's rules of procedure provide for observer status in the Committee for WTO Members which are not participants to the Ministerial Declaration and Governments that are observers to the Council for Trade in Goods. Requests for observer status by international intergovernmental organizations are considered on a case-by-case basis. The International Trade Centre (ITC) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have been granted observer status; and the World Customs Organization (WCO) has been granted observer status to meetings where the issues of HS classification and HS amendments are included in the agenda.

4. The Committee addressed a number of issues during the year. The Committee has regularly reviewed the status of implementation, a summary of which is provided in document G/IT/1 and its revisions. The document 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 most had been certified by the Director-General. It was noted that those participants that were not yet WTO Members were implementing the concessions on an autonomous basis. A few participants were still awaiting the completion of domestic procedural requirements or had not yet submitted the necessary documentation. During the year some issues were raised in the Committee concerning implementation problems for a few participants.

5. The Committee also consulted on non-tariff barriers relating to information technology products. The Australian delegation presented a proposal for a work-programme on non-tariff measures and many others submitted "national experience" papers on the subject. Deliberations on a

¹ One agenda item carried forward to 13 and 26 October 2000 when the meeting was resumed.

² The minutes of the meeting of 22 November 2000, G/IT/M/24, are in the process of being issued.

non-tariff measures' work programme continued throughout the year, and on 26 October 2000 the Committee agreed to a Non-Tariff Measures Work Programme on an *ad referendum* basis, subject to further consultations with capitals by 10 November 2000. Since no comments were received by this date, the Work Programme was deemed approved and issued as a formal document (G/IT/19). The Committee has initiated work related to Phase I (an inventory of NTMs) of the Work Programme.

6. The Committee also discussed classification divergences during the year. Noting the constructive work of the customs experts from their meeting in 1999, the Committee agreed to have another such informal meeting so that the customs experts could continue their work on this matter. In June 2000, a second meeting was held, and the results circulated in document G/IT/14, for the consideration of the Committee. Work on classification divergences is continuing, with a further informal meeting planned for 7-8 December 2000. The Committee took note of the updated documentation from the WCO concerning the classification of IT products.

7. The Chairperson regularly informed the Committee under "other business" that various participants continued to consult amongst themselves on review of product coverage. She encouraged delegations to continue consultations.
