

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Proposal on the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade

Communication from Japan

The following communication, dated 6 July 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Japan.

Proposal

1. The TBT Agreement provides international principles for removing technical barriers to trade, and it is indispensable for the development of the global economy in the next century that the Agreement works smoothly under the support of all Member countries. On the other hand, the TBT Agreement contains several simple provisions and it is necessary to clarify various elements in the Agreement in order to secure its reasonable operation. Especially, international standards are one of the most important elements of the TBT Agreement, and discussions for clarifications should be carried out on issues as measures to ensure transparency, openness and impartiality of international standards development procedures, or requirements of produced standards for being considered as an international standard in the context of the Agreement. Therefore, Japan proposes to examine the possibility of the above clarifications at the next negotiations.

Background

2. International standards make it possible to remove unnecessary technical barriers to trade by aligning national standards with them. International standards are expected to play a significant role in the context of the TBT Agreement.

3. However, present TBT Agreement does not have clear definition of what international standards are. Therefore, there is a possibility that standards that only reflect the needs of limited regions or standards that are technically outdated are treated as international standards. The absence of clear definition of international standards could hamper the achievement of the purpose of the TBT Agreement, which is the removal of technical barriers to trade through usage of international standards.

4. International standards should maintain market relevancy in their contents to meet the purpose of the TBT Agreement and, therefore, transparency, openness and impartiality throughout the whole process of international standards development should be secured fully. With such purposes, some disciplines should be established on international standards and their development procedures in relation to the TBT Agreement.

5. On the other hand, discussions are now conducted on the issue of transparency of international standards and international standardization bodies at the TBT Committee. Japan will actively continue to participate in these discussions in order to draw a conclusion that reflects Japanese concerns mentioned above. At the same time, possibilities should be examined to put issues of these Japanese concerns into the scope of the next negotiations.
