Mr. Chairman:

For almost half a century the Republic of Haiti has taken an effective part at international meetings, in the establishment of certain fundamental principles now governing the rights of peoples and of individuals. This was in keeping with our way of thinking as a small nation. Haiti is now working just as steadfastly on the study of practical means to attain international co-operation in the economic and social fields, without which world peace cannot be maintained. This is also in keeping with our position as a poor and semi-colonial country. Haiti enthusiastically supported the Chilean proposal which was discussed at the United Nations to bring this Economic Commission for Latin America into being. Now, on behalf of my Government, I wish to pay due tribute to Chile whose endeavours stand out so often in the vanguard of human progress in the ideological, economic, and social fields.

In response to the desire expressed by the Secretariat of the Commission, I propose to give a true picture of the economic situation of my country. As Haiti, owing to her limited resources, lacks the administrative organization, statistical and technical information necessary for the methodical preparation of a complete study, what I say will have only a very relative value. A truthful statement of my country’s position and loyal co-operation will constitute the best contribution she can make to the work of the Commission.

In his very excellent opening speech, our Chairman, Mr. Alberto Baitra, recalled the words once spoken by Alexander Humboldt: that “the peoples of Latin America are paupers seated on chairs of gold”. He was alluding to the enormous potential wealth of our nations. These untapped resources justify the greatest hopes and Haiti rejoices in them despite the fact that Haiti cannot but hope for “honorable mention” in the competition. The time is gone, we know, for building castles in Spain, and Haiti’s hopes must be
fixed on concrete, precise, and tangible objectives.

I should like now to refer to the suggestions contained in the documents issued by the Secretariat and confine myself to the present economic situation in Haiti, in relation to the problems created by the war and the lack of balance in world economy. But the special nature of our case compels me to paint a background to delineate more clearly a sombre subject, so dark by contrast to the brilliant colours that many delegates from countries more favoured by nature have displayed before us.

Among the twenty Latin-American republics, Haiti occupies, in size, the twentieth and last place; the twelfth in regard to area; and the first in population per unit of area, i.e. 108 inhabitants per square kilometre. To compare, Haiti is one and a quarter times smaller than El Salvador and three hundred times smaller than Brazil; while her population per unit of area is twice as large as that of El Salvador and fifty-four times larger than that of Paraguay. The rate of increase of the population is two and one-half births to one death. Haiti belongs to a group of Latin-American agricultural countries which count on tropical farming, and which have neither mines nor industries. Approximately one-third of her total area of 27,770 km. is arable land, which has been cultivated for the past three centuries. Hundreds of thousands of country people, either as owners, farmers, or tenant farmers, till the soil by primitive methods, without adequate equipment and without fertilizers. They raise crops both for their own subsistence and for export so as to obtain the necessary foreign exchange for the purchase of imports. As irrigation is available only for 35,000 to 40,000 hectares, crops depend on bi-yearly rainfalls. It is only through a miracle, which recurs every year, that this exhausted, impoverished country can go on feeding, clothing, and housing its population. There is a gradual lowering of the standard of living as a consequence of the pressure of its increasing population.

Despite its serious demographic problem, Haiti produces and exports coffee, bananas, sisal, sugar and their by-products; cotton and its by-products; cacao, essential oils, hides, castor-oil, rice; articles made of precious woods, sisal, straw, tortoise-shell and dyewoods. Out of more than twenty export items, ten are important. From 1915 to 1939, 78 per cent of our exports went to European markets, where we bought 23 per cent of our imports, while 74 per cent of our imports came from the United States, which consumed only 19 per cent of our exports. During the war we carried on our foreign trade almost exclusively with the United States. During the last financial post-war year, 1946-1947, 57 per cent of our exports went to the United States which furnished 87 per cent of our imports. During the last financial year, 1947-1948, 51 per cent of our exports went to the United States and 75 per cent of our imports came from the United States.

/Financial
financial year our exports amounted to 24,600 tons of coffee, 7,300,000 crates of plantains, 26,000 tons of sugar, 21,000 tons of sisal, 13,000 tons of molasses, 2,100 tons of cotton and its by-products, 3,200 tons of castor-oil, 1,900 tons of cacao, 5,000 tons of dyewoods and several thousand tons of miscellaneous products.

The value of these exports amounted to 157 million "gourds", which is the equivalent of US $31,200,000. The gourd is worth 20 cents in US currency, at the fixed rate of 5 to 1.

Our imports for the same fiscal year amounted to 136 million gourds, or US $27,200,000. Since the war, our balance has been favourable every year because of our inability to obtain certain manufactured goods. But, as the Cuban representative pointed out, we are only temporary custodians of this foreign exchange, until such time as international exchanges again become normal.

The national revenue for the last fiscal year was 65 million gourds, or US $13,000,000; the national expenditure 60 million gourds, or US $12,000,000. The national debt on 30 September 1947 was 49,000,000 gourds, or US $9,200,000. This is an internal debt, the external debt having been paid off during the last fiscal period by means of a domestic loan.

The economy of Haiti, which in this respect is similar to the economies of other Latin-American republics, depends on the sale of its export goods and is subject to the consequences of fluctuations of world prices. To show how serious this situation is, I would ask you to look back a little and you will see more than graphs can show you. You all know of the storied wealth of Santo Domingo which has gone down into history like that of the kingdom of the Viceroy of Peru. Well, in 1789, the most prosperous year of the colonial period, Santo Domingo exported 127,000 tons of various agricultural products, including seven main items, the sale of which yielded approximately 40,000,000 dollars. If this transaction in XVIIIth century francs of 20 souv could be converted into 1948 devaluated dollars, the price paid for the goods would be 315 dollars per ton. In 1938/39, just before the war, Haiti exported 147,000 tons of various agricultural products, including 10 essential classes of goods, which sold for 7,200,000 dollars, at 45 dollars per ton. In the post-war period 1946/47, 246,000 tons of various agricultural products were exported and sold for 31,000,000 dollars, at 126 dollars per ton. We see how in a century and a half the volume of exports went up by more than 100,000 tons, but prices for the same agricultural products dropped in 1938/39 to one-sixth and in 1946/47 to one-third of their value in 1789.

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On the other hand, unlike most of the other Latin-American countries, Haiti is not a pioneering country, with unexplored territories where surplus population and immigrants can settle and develop the land. This meagre heritage, taken from the French colonists of Santo Domingo, still serves the needs of a population which without immigration has increased in a century and a half from one million to three million inhabitants. It is therefore obvious that the solution of basic economic problems in Haiti must not be sought in the development of her agricultural resources which are so limited by local conditions. The real and rational solution can only be industrialization.

However, as the possibilities of industrialization are not yet clear, Haiti wishes to take advantage of the opportunity which the Commission offers to increase her production capacity, and strengthen her present economy while awaiting the transformation of her structure, and to raise the standard of living of her population as much as possible. Many unfavourable factors, which can be corrected, are responsible for the present under-production: lack of machinery, excessive parceling of the land, primitive farming methods, destruction of forests, erosion, lack of irrigation and drainage systems, lack of adequate transport systems, high percentage of illiteracy, malnutrition, an injudicious fiscal system, etc. Generally speaking, Haiti knows she must increase the area of the irrigation system, land reclamation, afforestation, soil conservation, and settlement in the inland regions, etc. She must also increase the yield per area unit, utilizing scientific farming methods, regrouping farms into co-operative societies, replacing and perfecting farm implements, mechanizing farming operations and using fertilizers. But Haiti is also aware of the fact that the country has neither the capital nor the technical means necessary to carry out this programme and reserves the right in due time, when the detailed study now proposed by the Commission has been made, to state her needs in this connection. For the time being, and in accord with the ideas expressed by all the delegations here present, we fully endorse the preliminary programme of studies and short-term measures.

Haiti's economic problems which were caused by the war, are similar to those confronting the other Latin-American countries. We went to war on the side of the Allies and had, therefore, to experiment with the cultivation of latex as a substitute for rubber to make up for the loss of sources of supply in the Far East. This meant that thousands of families living in the country had to be expropriated, their fruit trees and other plantations
plantations producing foodstuffs had to be destroyed, entailing the birth of an agrarian proletariat and the displacement of manpower. The abrupt discontinuation of this experiment, once it ceased to be necessary, was a shock to our economy, a shock from which it has not yet recovered. The loss of the European markets had much less effect upon us thanks to the generous help we received from the United States of America which purchased our export surpluses at standard prices. The restrictions on the sale of imported goods in the countries of supply, the exceptional war-time expenditures, the scarcity and high price of imported goods and the subsequent speculation, fostered an inflation which has now entered the vicious circle so well known to all of us: increase in prices - rise in salaries - increase in prices. The minimum daily pay was raised from 1 1/2 gourds in 1939 to 2 gourds in 1945 and then to 3 1/2 gourds in 1947 without, however, meeting the increase in the cost of living.

For all these reasons Haiti submits for the Commission's consideration the following proposal to meet urgent problems:

1. to undertake a thorough investigation into present economic conditions in the Latin-American countries, agricultural and industrial production, consumption and means of transport;
2. to set up working groups to analyze these economic conditions and in the light of such studies to recommend measures with a view to the early improvement of the situation in the Latin-American countries individually and as a whole, as regards the purchase of equipment, financing, mechanization and technical aid;
3. to analyze the economic problems arising out of the war and the post-war period and determine the probable extent of the favourable or unfavourable effects of the Marshall Plan upon the Latin-American economy;
4. to ascertain the exportable surpluses available from Latin-American sources and, following an analysis of the causes of the world food crisis, to determine what effects on allocation of these surpluses on a quota basis would have upon this situation;
5. to study, in agreement with the Specialized Agencies and the countries concerned, a system of payments enabling Latin-American countries to dispose freely of the foreign exchange obtained from the sale of these export surpluses.

In conjunction with this programme of immediate action, and in order to prepare a second long-term programme, Haiti, whose main objective is industrialization, proposes the immediate setting up of a sub-committee whose functions will be:

1. to collect,
1. to collect, with the help of the Specialized Agencies and
Governments concerned, as complete statistical data as possible on
each country;
2. to study means with a view to the transition from a colonial or
semi-colonial agricultural economy to an industrial economy;
3. to study the conditions now governing foreign investments in
Latin-American economies, as well as the problem of double taxation
on such investments, and in the light of such studies to recommend
measures conducive to the integration of these investments in the
national economies;
4. to study prevailing conditions in inter-American trade, and to
recommend appropriate measures for the development of inter-American
trade relations.

In addition to the items mentioned above, even if this were to imply an
extension of the terms of reference of the Commission, Haiti suggests the
setting up of a second sub-committee whose functions will be, in close
co-operation with the Specialized Agencies:

(a) to study the problems of the currencies of the Latin-American
and other countries concerned in trade exchanges with Latin-American
countries, and the effect of the devaluation of the US Dollar upon the
purchasing power of these currencies and their non-convertibility;
(b) to establish a uniform banking policy to be recommended to the
countries concerned;
(c) to determine to what degree co-operation could be established
between the State Central Banks with a view to the protection of
national currencies.

As similar or closely related views have been expressed by other
delations, it is obvious that the Commission's first task will be to
co-ordinate them, a task which, I am certain, will be rendered much easier
for us thanks to the competence of the Secretariat. Furthermore, the
existence of divergent points of view implies the possibility of friction.
To avoid this, a generous spirit of understanding and conciliation will be
required both in the investigation of practical measures and in the choice
of means for putting them into action. Haiti will, as I have said, bring
to these debates the greatest possible sincerity and spirit of conciliation.
It is only on questions of principles that we shall not yield.

I am happy to note that the representatives of France, Great Britain and
the United States have, all three, declared that the industrialization of
Latin-American countries does not threaten the interests of the large
industrial nations, and that it can only strengthen international trade. This statement, made by these three large industrial nations at the opening of these debates, must indeed be gratifying to small nations with a semi-colonial agricultural economy, nations such as Haiti, whose hopes for the future are based on industrialization.

Regarding immigration, which was proposed by some representatives as a positive contribution to the renewal of Latin-American economy, I wish to make a statement and a comment on behalf of my country. The statement is of a practical nature: Due to the great density of her population, as I have mentioned already, Haiti cannot allow any form of immigration, although, we understand fully and approve the desire shown by certain other Latin-American countries to obtain manpower by such means. This is founded on a question of principle: This immigration which is hoped for has been referred to as European. To avoid any further discussion on this point, permit me to draw the attention of the delegations concerned to the pejorative interpretation which might be made of this geographical qualification if it were to be considered, in practice, as a limitation or restriction. If immigration is recommended as a measure for adoption, it must be clearly stated that such immigration is open to one and all, whether American, European, African, Asiatic or Oceanian, in accordance with the principle set forth in paragraph 3 of Article 1, and sub-paragraph (c) of Article 55 of the United Nations Charter.

In closing I wish to express the hope that we, representatives of Latin-American countries, may avail ourselves of this opportunity which is being offered to us today, to discuss fully our economic problems, casting aside, at the same time, our political differences, the rancour of our old quarrels, our distrust, the prejudices which, at times, divide us; the feeling of pride on the part of some because they are wealthier, and of bitterness and envy on the part of others because they are poorer. I also hope that the representatives of non-Latin-American countries represented here, and the representatives of international agencies, will endeavour to understand us, and our problems, however complicated they may be, and that all will co-operate in this common task to the fullest possible extent, bearing in mind that it is possible to act together with a sense of honour only when working freely and in unison for the benefit of all can we collaborate with honour.