



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Commonwealth Caribbean Consultation on Recent Developments in Trade

POST-NAIROBI AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

MR. NORRIS HERBERT
PERMANENT SECRETARY (Ag.)
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY
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Good Morning to you all.

Apologies for the absence of Minister Gopee-Scoon who had to travel.

Let me begin by welcoming all of you here to Port of Spain. And a special good morning to my neighbors and colleagues from CARICOM - thank you for coming to Trinidad and Tobago.

A warm Caribbean welcome to those visiting from London and other distant places. We do appreciate your presence here with us. For those not from the Region, here in Trinidad and Tobago, we like to refer to ourselves as the land of oil and music.

Like many other energy exporters, we have been plagued by depressed energy prices in the last few years. What is more, in March this year, the Central Bank reported that crude oil production declined by 13.9%, and Natural gas production by 7.2 per cent compared to one year earlier. The Bank projects that for 2016, domestic GDP will contract by about 2%.

Our challenges are not unique. We all face some level of difficulty in today's trying times. In January, the IMF forecasted a 3.4 % growth rate for the global economy. This is a revision down from their initial 3.6% projection in the October 2015 Report.

For Venezuela the outlook is particularly grim. The Washington Post earlier this year described the Bolivarian Republic as "heading toward complete disaster". Reports of food shortages and looting have also been made. Our thoughts and prayers are with people of Venezuela at this time.

The problems that we face today are not new to us. The issues that plague us are not novel. For the most part, our CARICOM economies are dependent on few export commodities or sectors; the prices are in large part determined elsewhere; and to which we export to a small group of developed markets. Hence the need to diversify both exports and markets. For Jamaica, it was bauxite; Barbados and the OECS, Services; Guyana Rice and Sugar; and here in Trinidad and Tobago, it is oil and natural Gas.

Our situation is similar to many other developing countries. In 1995 many of our countries, with hopes of changing our economic realities, signed onto the WTO. We believed and still do, in the ability of a multilateral process to help developing countries successfully integrate and participate in the international community. Trinidad and Tobago, like many other members, was therefore quite encouraged by the launch of Doha in 2001 which had at its center the needs and interests of developing countries. Almost fifteen (15) years later, with ten (10) Ministerial Conferences and numerous Declarations behind us, the promise of Doha is yet to be realized.

It has not been all bad however.

Of the twenty (20) or so areas covered in the Doha work programme, some progress has been made in the Small Economies work programme and Technical Cooperation. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have had progress in areas of interest to them. The Aid for Trade initiative continues to hold good premise for development.

More recently, the 2013 Bali Ministerial Meeting delivered on a package of issues, chief among them was the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). This Agreement broke new ground regarding special and differential treatment. For the first time at the WTO, implementation of an obligation was tied to a country's ability to implement and receipt of technical assistance. This is not an insignificant accomplishment and I want to acknowledge the efforts of our Geneva based CARICOM officials for the critical role they played in achieving this outcome.

Six months ago in December of 2015 in Nairobi, we were also able to secure, what some has described as an "historic agreement" on Agriculture Export Competition. Members took the decision to eliminate the use of agriculture export subsidies and the imposition of disciplines on other trade distorting export support measures. This has been pursued by developing countries for many years. We are certainly encouraged by this outcome.

But while encouraging, Nairobi has had little bearing on the trade interests of Trinidad and Tobago's and CARICOM in general. The NAMA and Services market access negotiations of particular interest to us for instance are still to be completed. It was therefore disappointing to hear of calls for the closure of Doha last year when there was so much still to do. While disappointing, it was not unexpected. The world is much different from 2001. The products we trade and the manner in which we trade is different. It comes as no surprise to us that new issues such as electronic commerce, trade and the environment, as well as new approaches are being demanded by those that have been at the forefront of that change. Their response has been the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) Agreement, among others.

For most of us in the Region however, the situation remains largely unchanged from 2001. Regrettably the multilateral system, for far too long, has not worked for far too many of us. CARICOM and Developing countries must respond. But how? What is for certain is that our response must be bold. We owe it to our citizens.

We are mindful that despite its limitations, the WTO remains the Region's best chance to leverage its numbers to secure meaningful results. We must therefore seek to make the system work for us.

Trinidad and Tobago therefore supports the issues identified by CARICOM for inclusion in the post Nairobi work programme. These issues were discussed in October last year and subsequently endorsed by COTED in November. They include a desire to conclude negotiations in accordance with the Doha mandate and to include with SVE issues in all future negotiations.

Notwithstanding our support of those proposals, we recognize the need for bold action to achieve transformational change.

For Trinidad and Tobago there are two issues for which we would want to highlight.

The first relates to what we consider a major challenges in the context of progress at the WTO, namely the rise of the BRICS, particularly the Chinese economy and their standoff with the US. That relationship has adversely impacted developing countries and will continue to adversely impact us in the near future. Trinidad and Tobago therefore considers the proposal for the establishment of an independent category of "Small and Vulnerable Economies" as useful to overcome this issue. We would like to see this be made a priority issue for the post Nairobi work programme.

Non-tariff measures and other barriers, more so than tariffs, are major market access barriers for Trinidad and Tobago. They frustrate the businessman and the policy maker alike because of the difficulties involved in identifying and appropriately treating with them. Trinidad and Tobago also considers this issue a high priority for post Nairobi.

Ladies and gentlemen the task before you in the next two days is not an easy one. However, I trust that with the assistance of our facilitators and Geneva-based officials we would have at the end of session clear and insightful proposals for the way forward.

I wish you a fruitful two days.

I thank you.