



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

*WTO Regional Trade Policy
Course for Caribbean Members
and Observers in partnership with
the Institute of International
Relations, The University of West
Indies (UWI), St. Augustine
Campus, Trinidad and Tobago*

OPENING REMARKS

MR NORRIS HERBERT, PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

3RD JUNE, 2019

UWI

It is indeed a pleasure to join you this morning for the Opening Ceremony of the Trade Course in Trinidad and Tobago, under the auspices of the world's premier trade organisation (the World Trade Organization (WTO)) and the Caribbean's top academic institution. The Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) for Caribbean Members and Observers is truly a progressive step in the augmentation of the capacity and capability of trade professionals in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean in general. I therefore take this opportunity to extend my sincerest congratulations to the participants of the Course on their selection to embark upon this eight (8) week training programme.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) is pleased to note that for the first time in the history of this Programme, the RTPC will be hosted in Trinidad and Tobago. We are also pleased that the Institute of International Relations (IIR), of the University of the West of Indies (UWI) will be partnering with the WTO in the hosting of the RTPC.

The RTPC is one of the most comprehensive and engaging training Programmes held by the WTO in the Region. Participants can expect to gain a deeper understanding of the WTO Agreements and the functioning of the WTO, its rules and procedures. Participants will also benefit from a deeper understanding of relevant trade policy issues in their regional context and will have the opportunity to strengthen their network of regional contacts.

Whilst a number of Caribbean nationals have benefitted from the three month's programme in Geneva, we at Ministry of Trade and Industry view this programme as vital to facilitating the expansion of skillsets necessary to boost local and regional competence in key areas of the WTO and the multilateral trading system. Trinidad and Tobago has benefited from past RTPC Programmes held by the WTO both in Geneva and the CARICOM region, where several technical officers have had the opportunity to participate and gain critical knowledge and have contributed positively to Trinidad and Tobago's conduct of work under the WTO.

In light of the importance of the work at the WTO as a whole and to the global multilateral trading system, CARICOM has time and time again re-iterated its support for the rules-based, multilateral trading system embodied in the WTO.

In the Caribbean we follow with interest the issue of WTO reform being discussed in various quarters and that there are a number of proposals put on the table which have been advanced by many Member countries. We do advocate for inclusive, transparent discussions involving all WTO members and have emphasized the need to include small developing countries in these discussions to ensure their interests are secured.

To the course participants, I am reaching out to you to closely follow developments on the world stage at this time which challenges the stability of the WTO as a predictable rule based organization. Here I make reference to two key areas of the unilateral imposition of tariffs by some members and challenges with the reconstitution of the Dispute Settlement arrangements. As professionals representing small developing countries, your participation and involvement in the future activities of the WTO will be of tremendous importance.

Moving forward, there is a need to preserve and strengthen the long-established principles including Technical Assistance and Capacity Building (TACB), Special and Differential Treatment and the recognition of the concept of Small and Vulnerable Economies. Essentially, these issues are all linked to the sustainable development and successful integration of CARICOM Member States into the global economy.

Trinidad and Tobago as a Member of CARICOM reaffirms its support in these areas. We also wish to recognize the growing importance of issues being discussed at the multilateral level and to be presented during this Programme, including: Tariffs and Schedules, Trade Facilitation, Development and Transparency. In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago has been one of the earliest of members to notify our obligation in response to the Ministerial Trade Facilitation mandate. We also view new and emerging issues in the WTO as an integral area to be discussed during the RTPC, including discussions on Micro-Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Investment Facilitations and women and youth in trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen, upon completion of the Regional Trade Policy Course, you will return to your country and be able to apply the knowledge and competencies gained from this Programme to your designated areas of work. This can only serve to add value to fulfilling your country's role to the WTO and by extension the Region.

Trinidad and Tobago has been a Member of the WTO since 1995 and a Member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) since our Independence in 1962. Arising out of Trinidad and Tobago's Fourth WTO Trade Policy Review held on 22 and 24 May 2019, we reiterate our commitment to the principles of the WTO and of the multilateral trading system.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has been supportive of the Institute for International Relations, UWI in its preparations for the hosting of the RTPC in Trinidad and Tobago and the upcoming mid-term site-visit scheduled for 28 June 2019. These site-visits should prove to be an enjoyable yet learning experience for both participants and course instructors alike.

As we look towards a brighter and more prosperous future we must also recognize the key role that technical assistance and capacity building provided by the WTO can have in shaping our countries trade policies and practices. The Regional Trade Policy Course is one of the avenues by which this enhanced support can be delivered.

In closing, I offer you my best wishes as you embark upon this Programme and I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best in your journey along the path to improved international trade. Further, I am to assure the organisers that the Ministry of Trade and Industry continues to remain available to assist if needed to contribute to the success of the course.

I thank you.