



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

Parliamentarian Workshop 2016

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION –
WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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HYATT REGENCY HOTEL, TRINIDAD

Good morning to you all and welcome to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I trust that you will have an opportunity to experience some of the delights of our twin-island nation before you leave our shores.

Let me first acknowledge the efforts of the Trinidad and Tobago and London Branches of the CPA and the WTO Secretariat for their work in organizing and facilitating this workshop.

2016 has been a remarkable year for the casual observer; but for parliamentarians involved in multilateralism and representative politics, it has been a reminder of how dynamic the world is and how we must constantly be aware of the needs and desires of the people we serve. This requires us to reassess constantly our current institutions and processes, and collaborate to improve upon them for the benefit of all. The political changes in the United States and Great Britain are only two examples of the dynamism of democracies and more relevant to us being here today, how economics, trade and prosperity have a direct impact on the lives of people and the decisions they make.

These changes do not negate the relevance of institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, but rather reinforce the need for solidarity and understanding among disparate peoples, countries and regions, to create systems that are fair and flexible in which goods and services can be traded to create opportunities, wealth, growth and a better standard of living for everyone. From the perspective of Trinidad and Tobago, the WTO is an invaluable institution that creates a level playing field and raises the standards through which we participate in global trade.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to the multilateral system and to the WTO. Trinidad and Tobago has been a strong proponent of multilateralism and the work of the WTO Secretariat, since its establishment in 1995.

The WTO remains Trinidad and Tobago's, and if I may dare say, the Region's, best chance to leverage its small size in the international trading community. The multilateral process, and in particular the Doha Development Round, is an important part of our wider national development strategy.

Doha is the only negotiating Round that has placed the needs and interests of developing countries at the heart of the WTO's Work Programme. Doha's goal of providing meaningful access for developing countries' exports to developed markets in a fair and balanced way aligns with our own strategies for sustainable economic growth and diversification.

For a long time, the Energy sector has been the single largest economic driver in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognised that there is need for structural reform to build upon and expand away from the energy sector into new growth areas. As a consequence, the Government intends to pursue several diversification and competitiveness building initiatives targeted at the Services and Non-energy sectors. The area of manufacturing remains a priority and we are committed to supporting an improved business environment as well as firms' abilities to sustainably produce goods and services at a competitive price and quality.

Several sub-sectors that have demonstrated growth potential have already been identified for development including the (1) Agriculture; (2) Maritime, (3) Creative; (4) Tourism and (5) Financial Services sub-sectors. It is Government's intention to also expand and enhance market access for these areas in traditional and non-traditional export markets in North, South and Central America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

The premature conclusion of the Doha is therefore not a desirable outcome for us. The many hard fought

advances that were made in favour of developing countries and Small Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) after 14 years of negotiations would have been for nought. It is therefore discouraging that so many major countries have signalled disinterest in completing Doha. Others went as far as to withhold reaffirming their commitment to the negotiations during the last Ministerial Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. Trinidad and Tobago nevertheless remains firm in its conviction and support of the Doha Round and the multilateral process.

Trinidad and Tobago congratulates the government and people of Kenya for successfully hosting the 2015 Nairobi Ministerial Conference, the first such Conference to be held in continental Africa. Nairobi was not only successfully conducted but it also delivered in some important areas, similar to the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference where the Trade Facilitation Agreement was completed.

Most notably, Nairobi delivered what some have described as a historic agreement to eliminate and discipline the use of agriculture export subsidies and other trade distorting export support measures. Trinidad and Tobago certainly agrees that this result is a significant one, particularly for developing countries heavily dependent on agriculture exports struggling to compete in subsidized developed markets.

There were other notable outcomes in Nairobi, including a decision on a Special Safeguard Mechanism that allows developing countries to raise duties on agriculture products in times of harmful import surges. There were decisions in favour of Least Developing countries regarding Cotton and Services. However like Bali before it, Nairobi did not address the outstanding negotiations for Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) and Services, among others. That job has been left for Ministers to accomplish before the next Ministerial Conference in Argentina next year. It is our hope that at that meeting, Member States would be in a position to successfully conclude the Doha Round.

For this to happen all Members, including us here in the Region, must continue to feed into the negotiating process and prepare specific proposals for negotiations as urged by Director General Roberto Azevedo. Trinidad and Tobago, for its part, will continue to support and contribute to the work of the CARICOM, Small and Vulnerable Economies (SVE) and ACP Groups in Geneva in preparation for the next ministerial. These Groups in particular have done yeoman service to progress the work of the WTO in recent years. I thank the hard working chairmen and chairwomen, many of whom hail from the Caribbean, for their exemplary service and commitment.

In preparation for the 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Argentina, the ACP group has already signalled to the WTO some of its priority issues for the post Nairobi work programme. Trinidad and Tobago shares and supports those priorities which include:

- Reaffirmation of the multilateral trading system and the completion of the Doha Round
- a development-oriented outcome at the MC11, consistent with various recent global commitments and goals, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- reductions in trade distorting domestic support in Agriculture
- a permanent solution on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes that satisfactorily addresses the food security concerns of all developing countries
- an outcome on a Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) for developing countries that would limit the negative impacts of import surges or sharp drops in the prices; and
- the submissions of proposals that seek to keep Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) at the core of the negotiations including the Services negotiations.

With regard to Trade Facilitation, an area of great interest to us, I am pleased to indicate to the workshop that Trinidad and Tobago was the ninth Member State to accept the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)

and the first in the Caribbean. Last year we also submitted our Category “A” Commitments and are undertaking to do the same for the remaining categories. Our National Trade Facilitation Committee is fully established and has been operational since March of this year. Trinidad and Tobago is also in collaboration with our CARICOM colleagues on a coordinated approach to implementing the agreement, with assistance from the World Bank Group. We look forward to the Agreement’s acceptance by all members to facilitate its entry into force.

With respect to this workshop, the session on day two dedicated to discussing “possible new issues for the WTO agenda” should be extremely stimulating. In Geneva there appears to be growing interest in new areas such as electronic commerce and trade and the environment. This is not surprising given that the world is changing rapidly because of technology with details available instantly at one’s fingertips with “everything online” and the ubiquity of social media. One’s responsibility to the environment must not, however, be ignored. This has impacted on how, what and where we trade and necessitated the creation of new rules to treat with the resultant challenges brought about by the new “digital economy”.

We recognize and acknowledge all of this and accept that this is the reality in which we now live but it is important to address outstanding issues from the “analog economy”. Issues such as non-tariff barriers; our vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as our characteristic mono-crop and capacity constrained economies, continue to pose considerable challenges to the Caribbean. We cannot wish these issues away and neither should our negotiating partners seek to move on to other areas. It is my hope that this workshop will clarify the issues and stimulate discussions and available options for the Caribbean.

Finally, in recent times a number of significant agreements have emerged such as the Trade in Services Agreement or TiSA, the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) Agreement, among others. We note with some concern the proliferation of such agreements. Whether or not it is proven to be true that these agreements are a direct response to the failure of multilateralism to deliver, it remains of concern to us because of the potential they have to suppress interest in and progress at the WTO.

With respect to the dispute settlement process, we underscore our desire for reform of the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism. A significant advantage of membership to the WTO is fair and equitable treatment before a dispute settlement panel. Unfortunately, we in the Region have seen first-hand the shortcomings of that mechanism in the case of Antigua and Barbuda and Cuba. I therefore look forward to the discussions of this topic and the views of the Honourable Members.

In closing, it must be said that CARICOM, the wider Caribbean and in fact all developing countries must respond to the new economic realities and challenges before us. These challenges require our collective efforts. As a region, we must have honest, open and frank discussions of the issues. We must ask, how best we can leverage our shared political, social and economic spaces to the benefit of all our people? Old comfort zones and feelings of entitlement must be abandoned and sacrifices made. We may be strong as individual nations but together we can be stronger. We owe it to our citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen the issues before us are not simple. However, I trust that with the assistance of the WTO and CPA facilitators there will be insightful discussions and at the end of this session, a clearer understanding of the issues and a path to chart on the way forward.

Best wishes to you all for a successful workshop.

I thank you.