

## **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

### **STATEMENT TO INFORMAL TNC ON BEHALF OF THE OECS ECONOMIC UNION**

**10 December 2018**

Chair, this statement is being delivered on behalf of the WTO Members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States [OECS] Economic Union.

At the outset allow me to thank you Director-General for your report as well as the Chairs of the respective negotiating groups for their reports. Allow me also to associate the Members of the OECS Economic Union with the statements delivered by Haiti on behalf of CARICOM and Vanuatu [of Malawi] on behalf of the ACP Group.

Chair, we take note of the messages received from the meetings that have taken place globally including the recently concluded G20. These meetings and the signals received have been particularly instructive on the question of WTO Reform. We further note that outcome communiqués from these encounters all strongly validate the need for a strong and effective multilateral trading system. More than most, OECS Member States need a well-functioning, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive and equitable multilateral trading system that represents and responds to the legitimate needs and concerns of all Members.

Chair, notwithstanding the conversations taking place on WTO reform within this house as well as in bilateral and plurilateral settings, all outcomes of these discussions should: (1) preserve the primacy of the multilateral trading system; (2) preserve the consensus based approach to the establishment of new rules and (3) should not add to or diminish from the balance of rights and responsibilities without the explicit consent of the entire membership. Chair to this end, these conversations have to be brought back to the full membership if they are to have any semblance of legitimacy.

Chair, while it is right to focus attention on solving the log-jam related to the appointment of Appellate Body Members, it is vital that other long-standing and unaddressed issues be also considered, including the non-implementation of Rulings of the Appellate Body, and here I speak of specifically a case of high importance to one of our OECS Member States, Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr Chair, we believe that in cases such as this, the credibility and legitimacy of the multilateral trading system is being called into question. It refers to an online gaming case brought by Antigua and Barbuda against the United States, a ruling a favour of Antigua and Barbuda made in 2007.

Mr Chair, engagement on issues related to the Dispute Settlement Body should not foreclose engagement on the broader reform of the Dispute Settlement Understanding with a view to making the system work more equitably for all members.

Chair while we accept that some members have identified both structural and procedural challenges with the existing system, we do not accept the need for a root and branch change to the multilateral trading system. Moreover Chair, we do not see a need to fundamentally re-shape the balance between the rights and responsibilities of Members. The OECS will continue to work constructively to achieve the goals and objectives of this organisation and to deliver meaningful development enhancing outcomes.

Chair moving beyond systemic concerns; permit me to quickly share my impressions of some of the reports tabled earlier today.

On fisheries subsidies, we would like to thank the Chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules for his hard work and consultation in establishing the forward looking work programme. In concrete terms, given the intensification of work in 2019 in varying configurations and formats, we urge members to convene meetings sequentially and not in parallel, given the need to secure an inclusive and transparent process. Such inclusivity will allow for all members to contribute to finding a platform on which a final agreement can be established ahead of the 2019 deadline. The fisheries sector in the OECS is primarily artisanal, subsistence and small-scale in nature, we therefore support the development of rules that proscribe harmful fisheries practices while preserving sufficient policy space for the development of our fisheries sectors.

Chair, given the importance of finding a landing zone on this issue before the end of 2019, we urge that the Secretariat make every effort to support the participation of Capital based experts who can assist us with the heavy lifting in the first half of next year.

On agriculture, we note the active engagement of the Committee on Agriculture in Special Session and thank the Chair for his efforts aimed at fostering much needed progress. We urge however that the development dimension including, SVE specific flexibilities settled under the draft negotiating text be given equal treatment and priority and fully integrated into the substance of ongoing negotiations.

On process, the OECS would like to express concern with the scheduling of important meetings. Overlapping and parallel meetings make it difficult, for small delegations like ours to meaningfully participate. Chair, allow me, through you, to request that the Secretariat, working with the Chairpersons of the various Negotiating Groups and Committees, make every effort to avoid convening meetings in a manner that make it impossible for the participation of small delegations.

Chair, Small Island developing states like the OECS islands should be afforded special treatment beyond what is currently available under existing rules.

SVEs should therefore be provided with flexibilities commensurate with their acute vulnerability to environment[a] and climate change induced risks and hazards. Chair, we note with appreciation the analytical work being undertaken by the WTO Secretariat on the link between environmental risk and trade. In this view, we urge the establishment of metrics such as a *vulnerability index* that can be used to establish an effective baseline for enhanced flexibilities for climate vulnerable islands.

Chair, the overnight destruction of the economies of OECS member states like Dominica and Barbuda is a clear demonstration of the significant threat and impact of climate change and the resulting distributions caused to economic activity and trade with the rest of the world.

Chair the international community led by the WTO must take concrete actions to address what is quickly becoming a survival [existential] issue for Small Island developing states. We therefore call on Members to work towards establishing safeguards that could be triggered after a catastrophic natural disaster that would allow sufficient policy space for recovery.

We also urge that new rules support the building of economic and trade resilience in Small Island developing states like the OECS

Finally, Chair, as we bring 2018 to a close, we look forward to renewed engagement and vigour in 2019 on issues of common concern to the entire membership.

Chair, as always, the OECS will play its part in that process.

Chair, I thank you.

**Geneva**

**10 December 2018**