COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION / WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION
REGIONAL TRADE WORKSHOP FOR THE CARRIBEAN, AMERICAS AND ATLANTIC REGION (CAA)
PORT OF SPAIN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
22 NOVEMBER-24 NOVEMBER, 2016
OPENING REMARKS
HON SHIRLEY OSBORNE, MLA SPEAKER OF THE MONTSERRAT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY & VICE-CHAIRPERSON COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George, Speaker of the Trinidad and Tobago House of Representatives

Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry – Trinidad and Tobago

Honourable Ministers

Honourable Members

Mr Bernard Kuiten, Head of External Relations, World Trade Organisation

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

It gives me great pleasure to join the Honourable Speaker in welcoming you to this Regional Trade Workshop for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region.

I am especially delighted to be here with you today in my role as a fellow Parliamentarian and Speaker from the CAA region and, as the Vice-Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – one of the two organisations responsible for delivering this programme today.

I would also take this opportunity to express my thanks to the World Trade Organisation for its continued partnership and collaboration in this crucial area of regional interest and parliamentary business.

Allow me also to express the Association’s gratitude to the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament for agreeing to host this important workshop.

Madam Speaker, thank you for your Parliament’s continued cooperation in this regard. It demonstrates the commitment of the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament to the promotion of Commonwealth values to which we all subscribe.

Trinidad and Tobago has always been a highly active member of the CPA – indeed they are one of a few CPA Branches who can boast of having hosted the CPA Annual Conference – no small feat for this twin island republic when they hosted the 45th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 1999. The theme of that Conference quite aptly describes our workshop today - “Responsibility, Accountability and Transparency –
Enhancing Good Governance by Improving Democratic Standards in International and Domestic Decision-making”.

To that end, this workshop is designed to enable us as Parliamentarians to obtain a better understanding of the current international trading dialogue, the WTO Rules and its functions. It is also geared to enhance our understanding of the Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences, and the way forward on the Post Nairobi Negotiations.

This workshop is not the first of its kind but follows on earlier collaborations between the CPA and the WTO. One of the discussion points from these earlier workshops was the impact of the activities of the WTO on the work of parliaments and parliamentarians and concerns that WTO rules and regulations agreed by governments were encroaching on policy-making areas beyond tariffs and trade. In this regard, it was widely agreed that a rules-based international trading system had significant repercussions for parliamentary practice and procedure, accountability and scrutiny.

As Parliamentarians we are an important link between constituents and their government and we provide information exchanges between domestic and international interests. It is therefore critical for us to keep the public informed about the importance of looking at the world as a global market place where the flow of goods and services are crucial for the sustenance of our small island states. It is also important for us to work collectively to create a world trading system and indeed a global economy that is equitable and fair and leaves no one behind. This type of workshop allows us to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the origins and principles of WTO and to use the principles to serve our people better.

As Vice Chairperson of the Association I am proud to be holding this position at a time when the CPA is reinvigorating and re-positioning itself as a leader in identifying and promoting benchmarks of good governance and the enduring values of the Commonwealth. Values to which we all adhere and which have been enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

These values are underpinned by the separation of powers between the three branches of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. In their respective spheres,
they are the guarantors of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and a determinant of a country’s adherence to good governance.

In this regard, the CPA has been working with you, our members and with our developmental partners, to strengthen Parliament’s oversight functions over the executive.

We all acknowledge that though it is the responsibility of governments to negotiate international trade agreements, it is the responsibility of Parliament to legislate and scrutinise government action.

It is this fact that highlights the importance of workshops such as these which improve our understanding of the international trade dialogue.

To use a quote from our host ‘The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognises that trade is the life blood of the economy’. A fact that is true for many of the small states of this region.

According to the WTO, 80 to 90 per cent of world trade relies on trade finance. Certainly one of the focuses on the Commonwealth family is to champion small states to make sure they can trade in global markets. In that regard, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Valetta, Malta in 2015 a new initiative aimed at providing assistance to support the developmental interests of Small and Developing Members of the Commonwealth was launched. The Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility was the result of a mandate issued at the 2013 leaders’ summit to help small and developing Commonwealth countries increase their trade capacity.

Many of us here today represent jurisdiction who form part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and we are aware of the importance that these regional trade networks form for our local communities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our colleagues from Suriname. Though not members of the Commonwealth, I know their presence here today highlights the shared importance of this workshop for our region. This important initiative, I am sure,
will bring great benefit to all present and the CPA stands ready to support this close collaboration.

In April this year, myself and fellow members of the CPA Executive Committee approved an ambitious Programmes Strategy for the Association. This Programmes Strategy boasts 9 new areas of programme work for the Association. One of these programme areas is called the CPA Masterclass. I am pleased to announce that at this Trade Workshop we will be launching the first in the series of these CPA Masterclasses, the aim of which is to develop a video/web-based resource library aimed at building parliamentary capacity and efficiency.

This Masterclass will focus on trade and when uploaded to the CPA website, will provide its viewers with a small sample of two of the sessions from this workshop.

The success of this workshop is dependent on you. We therefore look forward to your maximum participation and interaction, the outcome of which should be shared between yourselves, as well as with members in legislatures of the Caribbean, Atlantic and Americas Region not present today and the wider CPA.

In the coming year, the Secretariat will be unveiling many of the new programme strands which I know will support our membership, by offering more diverse training through new and innovative platforms from which to learn, share knowledge and experiences; and to carve our niche in providing tailored and targeted assistance to our legislatures.

It will be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the pivotal role played by the new Secretary-General of the CPA, who’s vision it was which contributed to the development of this Revised Programmes Strategy. This Strategy is the brainchild of Mr Akbar Khan, the 7th Secretary-General of the CPA and a son of these Caribbean shores.

In closing, I wish to thank most sincerely the World Trade Organisation for their partnership with the CPA and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for hosting the CPA, and also to our resource team who have agreed to take time out of their busy schedules to assist us.

Hon Speaker, Hon. Members, ladies and gentlemen, I join our host in welcoming all of you to this Regional Trade Workshop and look forward to your fruitful participation and deliberations.
Thank you very much for your kind attention.