The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette George, Speaker of the House
Opening Remarks delivered at the Regional Trade Workshop for Parliamentarians from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago 22 – 24 November, 2016
Salutations

- Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry-
- The Honourable Shirley Osbourne, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Montserrat and Vice Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA);
- Ministers, Ministers of State and other Parliamentary Members
- Ambassador Gail Mathurin, Office of Trade Negotiations, The Caribbean Community (CARICOM);
- Dr. Chantal Ononaivu, Office of Trade Negotiations, The Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
- Dr. Keith Nurse, University of the West Indies Cave Hill, Barbados;
- Mr Dav-Ernan Kowlessar, Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC);
- Mr Bernard Kuiten, Head of External Relations of the World Trade Organization;
- Ms Ankai Xu, Information Officer of the World Trade Organization; and
- Ms Alicia Stephens, International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank office in Port of Spain;
Contending with Trade

It is my pleasure this morning to bring opening remarks at the Regional Trade Workshop for Parliamentarians, for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region. We are all too well aware that trade is not a nuanced area or theme in the Atlantic World. Trade is historically anchored within the wider context of economics and migration, (Jeorge Thompson Araujo et.al, 2016) which has given rise to new social forces and continues to be a main-stake in our development, including our modern day development cycles and transitions.

This heavily inter-linked and intersected segment, has led to Latin America and the Caribbean region achieving a decade of remarkable growth and income convergence as growth increased in the early 2000s beyond the scales of those in the earlier decades 1900s. This spurred level of growth for the region was due impart, to a supportive external environment, reinforced with favourable terms of trade and improvements for the regions commodity exporters.

Trade, Development and the SDG’s

What is evident, is that trade plays a vital role in the development of our nations. In the Caribbean for example, as we are faced with various challenges which are neatly captured in the Sustainable Developmental Goals, such as:

- the eradication of poverty - goal 1;
- zero levels of hunger - goal 2; and
- good health and well-being - goal 3;
in order for us to meet these goals, they require our full attention and one area where they can be achieved is through trade.

It is no secret that trade significantly impacts employment and development and so critically, in the latest *Trade and Shared Prosperity in the Caribbean Region Report (2014)*, it is lamented that firms involved in export activities account for 34% of formal employment in the region which is slightly above that of developing countries (The World Bank, 2014). Moreover, poorer Caribbean economies have benefited significantly from employment in exporting firms (The World Bank, 2014). Information from the Office of the United States Trade Representative, points to the volume of trade within the Western Hemisphere, which includes, CARICOM, bilateral trade councils and the Andean Community, to a tune of $318 billion in 2014, which has immense effects on our economies, in terms of job creation, though other schools of thought continue to pinpoint that despite the volume of trade, which speaks to quantity and it does not in fact have a qualitative impact when fully assessed.

**Questioning Trade: Profit and Reality**

These schools of thought go further in that they question, what real effect is experienced by the common man and is there actual and sustainable opportunities for our citizens? After all profits are one aspect of the trade and development cycle, are these profits shared equitably to ensure that our objectives are met? And as legislators, have we allowed leakages to prevail or are we left behind in the new
developments in this arena? What does this mean for our operation and current patterns of trading and is it time to evolve and assess our competiveness taking it beyond its current scope? And finally, what have we gotten from the Nairobi Package and do we understand it, and what relationship does this new undertaking mean for the Doha Round of Discussions?

**From Doha**

In an attempt to assess these questions we must turn to Doha Development Agenda and work our way to Nairobi, Kenya. The Doha rounds sought to end import taxes/tariffs on various commodities and was adamant about the culmination of subsidies for farmers. These initiatives by extension would have multiplier effects, especially on taxes and regulatory barriers that impact cross-border trade, such as banking services, intellectual property rules and copyright matters. Though seemingly positive, the multilateral discussions were marred by what some have called issues of insularity. Others were accused of not actively seeking to correct the structural flaws and distortions in the trading systems and frameworks. At the crux of the matter was this, many wanted fair trade in a realm of free trade and though these are simple terminologies, their meaning differed depending on your world perspective. Though stalled, the Doha Development Agenda continues, as there are import matters to be fleshed out and under the principle of a single under taking, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.
To Nairobi

What the Seattle and thence the Doha Development Agenda are yet to achieve, the Bali and Nairobi Conferences have significant inroads, and though arduous, it shows what can be, and what is possible when we remain committed to our goals. At the Tenth Ministerial Conference on December 15, 2015, the Nairobi Package was negotiated and expanded upon the Bali Decisions of 2013. Of the various developments, I will touch on three of the more prominent decisions:

1. The Nairobi Package includes a Ministerial Decision on Export Competition, with a commitment to abolish export subsidies for specific agricultural exports. Notably, developed countries have agreed to remove most of their existing subsidies immediately, while developing countries are permitted to gradually remove their subsidies, with a total elimination deadline of 2018.

2. The package also held Safe Guard Mechanisms (SSM) for Developing Countries and recognised the need for these territories to temporarily increase tariffs on imported goods. This means and specifically acknowledges that materials, specifically “cotton from Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs) should be given duty free and quota free access to developed markets of developing countries and to developing markets where possible. The deadline for this schemed commenced earlier this year, on January 1st, 2016” (Nurse, 2016, p. 11)
3. The “Ministerial Decision on the Implementation of Preferential Treatment in Favour of Services and Service Suppliers of LDCs and Increasing LDC Participation in Services Trade WT/MIN(15)/W/39” (Nurse, 2016, p. 18) was also adopted and under this decision, the services and service suppliers from LDCs may be granted preferential treatment for an extended period of 15 years. This new arrangement expires on the December 31, 2030. Notably, in January of this year, 21 WTO members had submitted notifications granting preferences to LDC services and service suppliers.

Jamaica’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator A.J. Nicholson, Q.C., in his addresses at the plenary session of the Tenth World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference, advocated for the following initiatives to be adopted:

a) The decision relating to the G90 proposals on Special and Differential Treatment Provisions including those related to small, vulnerable economies and least developed countries;

b) Agricultural issues, including the Special Safeguard Mechanism, which were proposed by the G33 in November, 2015,

c) Fisheries Subsidies,

d) The Work Programme on Small Economies, and

e) Special Measures for least developed countries.

While all these initiatives were not adopted out rightly, it is evident that some of the suggested areas resonated and received just consideration. The decisions that were adopted at the Tenth Ministerial Conference are legally binding and show that we
are not fearful to negotiate. We must be willing to also bring resolution to other matters which threaten food and environmental security such as disciplining subsidies that contribute to overfishing and tightening rules on anti-dumping practices.

Nonetheless, what we have before us is essentially an alternate route to achieving the mandate which stemmed from Doha. Moreover, what we have here before us and by our attendance here, is a “strong commitment” to continue advancing negotiations as we seek to implement and operationalizes decisions that have been taken. We are also tasked to work with the World Trade Organization to understand our current economic and trading realities and how to best come into vogue with the changing tides of international trade.

This three day session shall assist in better understanding the WTO rules and functions, understand the decision that have been taken at the Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences, a way forward on the Post Nairobi Negotiations, including possible ways to conclude the Doha Rounds and finally, this is an opportunity for us legislators to exchange views and our experiences in economic trade policies including emerging challenges that affect our economies.

In closing, I welcome all of you and let us make this opportunity worthwhile. I thank you!
Works Cited


Useful links

I. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/after-nairobi-what-next-for-world-trade/


