Dear Madame Speakers  
Dear Minister  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this regional parliamentary workshop, organized jointly with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. My colleague Ankai and I are very pleased to be here and look forward to an interesting and interactive dialogue. We are very grateful for all the work done so far, in particular by our host, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me thank the two honourable Speakers for the thoughtful views and ideas, which I am sure, will feed into the discussions in the coming days.

Before handing over to Minister Gopee-Scoon, allow me to say a few introductory words on behalf of WTO, and in particular, on behalf of my Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo.

I believe it is no secret to anyone in this room that trade is very much in the center of attention these days. Be it in the US, in the UK, or even as recent as in Lima during APEC or yesterday, when President-elect Donald Trump announced his departure from TPP the day he will take office, trade has center stage and is often being cornered as either cause, reason or target of many of the world’s misgivings and concerns. While these concerns are genuine, the debates that we witness are biased, or at least absent of facts needed to express sound judgement. Whereas in a
changing world, many feel left behind and undeniable blame trade for this, too few seem to acknowledge that to a larger extent, job losses or displacements are caused by productivity increases, technological progress and innovation, and not merely by increased trade or foreign competition.

Nonetheless, trade is blamed and easy remedies such as raising barriers and restrictions are prescribed as solutions.

We cannot deny that people feel left behind because of trade. Yet rising unemployment, diminishing welfare gains and social support cannot be countered by disconnecting from global trade and change in general. It would have the exact opposite effect.

To be more inclusive and access new opportunities, we have to embrace change, adapt and support everyone involved and create possibilities for those wanting to be involved.

This embracing of change, ladies and gentlemen, is actually what we see happening at WTO. We are as we say "back in business".

Why? Because the WTO membership understood that business as usual no longer works. They accepted the principle of more tailored and flexible progress on specific matters and issues, simply because large all-encompassing negotiating rounds were no longer successful.

In Bali, 2013, members agreed on a trade facilitation agreement, relevant for all and flexible to everyone. In Nairobi, 2015 a development package was adopted, the ITA extended and open minded approach to new issues exposed.

This optimism and pragmatic attitude prevails in our work towards the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in December 2017. We
think there are good opportunities for a deal on environmental goods, as well as progress on fishery subsidies, services facilitation and discussion of new issues such as ecommerce and SMEs. And a prevailing preference for flexibility and a strong and continued focus on concerns of different groups of developing countries.

Yet, the roadblocks ahead are still numerous, and far from low and easy. We will need pragmatism, openness and flexibility from all members, both on substance or on process.

In the next few days, I hope we can touch upon some of these matters, both from a WTO and general trade perspective, but above all, from a regional point of view.

I invite you to be frank, open and thoughtful. Legislators represent the eyes and ears of society, and your inputs are important and crucial before, during and at the end of a negotiating process, let alone the implementation of results. My colleague Ankai and I are therefore looking forward to a good 2.5 days of discussion.