Concluding remarks by the Chairperson

The fourth Trade Policy Review of Trinidad and Tobago has offered us a better understanding of trade and economic developments in the country over the past seven years. I would like to thank the Trinidad and Tobago delegation, led by H.E. Senator Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry, for its constructive engagement throughout this Review. I would also like to thank the discussant, H.E. Ambassador Michael Gaffey of Ireland for his insightful remarks, and all the delegations that took the floor for their valuable contributions. The more than 200 questions submitted by 15 Members, and the interventions by 23 delegations underline the importance attached by WTO Members to Trinidad and Tobago's trade and investment policies and practices.

Members noted that during the period under review the economy of Trinidad and Tobago was negatively impacted by fluctuations in oil and gas prices. The economy remains driven by natural gas and petrochemical exports, even if the industrial and financial sectors are being developed to diversify the economy. To address its declining and volatile revenue from the energy sector, the Government launched various reform plans including "Vision 2030", the National Aid for Trade Strategy, the National E-Commerce Strategy, as well as its sector policies for e-commerce, special economic zones, ICT development, the yachting industry and the national quality system.

Members were pleased that the recession seems now to belong to the past, and that economic growth has resumed. It was noted that GDP growth was expected to average 1.5% for the next five years. Members also commended Trinidad and Tobago for positive developments in economic indicators, such as declining inflation, and low unemployment.

On the multilateral front, Members appreciated the active role played by Trinidad and Tobago in the WTO, including in the negotiating groups. They were pleased to see that Trinidad and Tobago accepted the Protocol Amending the TRIPS Agreement in 2013 and ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2015. Some Members encouraged Trinidad and Tobago to join the ITA, so as to contribute to the development of its ICT infrastructure. Members were encouraged by the steps taken by Trinidad and Tobago to improve its government procurement regime through the new Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act. Trinidad and Tobago was encouraged to consider taking part as an observer to the Agreement on Government Procurement.

Members commended Trinidad and Tobago for the ongoing modernization of its customs infrastructure. The introduction of a single electronic window in 2012 had already contributed significantly to trade and business facilitation, and Members were pleased to note that Trinidad and Tobago is making efforts to further improve this tool. Members also welcomed the introduction in 2019 of a new online payment system for import tariffs, other taxes, and user fees. Members encouraged Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate access to visas and foreign exchange, with a view to establishing a more conducive environment for business and investment.

Some Members suggested areas for improvement in the SPS regime, including reducing approval process times for foreign meat-exporting establishments, and increasing predictability and clarity of the SPS requirements, particularly regarding the importation of animals. Concerns were also expressed over Trinidad and Tobago's announcement of an import prohibition on plastics from 2019. Some Members urged Trinidad and Tobago to notify the measure to the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, so as to allow comments from Members.

Many Members viewed intellectual property rights as an important tool to foster creative industries, entrepreneurship and fuel economic growth; they expressed interest in knowing more about enforcement actions, particularly those intended to address piracy of televised programming and infringement on the Internet through streaming devices.

There were other areas of particular concern to Members, including:

1. Tariff breaching: Members noted that the applied MFN rate exceeded the corresponding bound rate on 59 tariff lines in 2018, up from 50 in 2011. Members urged Trinidad and Tobago to bring its applied tariffs into conformity, and we have heard from the Minister today that these are priority actions for Trinidad and Tobago.
2. Import surcharges: Members noted that while import surcharges imposed in 1990 were supposed to be temporary, Trinidad and Tobago continued to apply new import surcharges. Many Members were interested to know the reasons for applying and maintaining these surcharges, and asked Trinidad and Tobago to elaborate on its plans to abolish them. We also have heard actions and plans on these areas.
3. Outstanding notifications: Members noted that Trinidad and Tobago's notifications to the WTO are not up to date or outstanding in several areas, including domestic support and export subsidies in agriculture, quantitative restrictions, customs valuation, and state trading enterprises. Noting that transparency is essential to the functioning of the WTO, many Members encouraged Trinidad and Tobago to comply with notification requirements.     We were pleased to hear today that Trinidad and Tobago had made a formal request for technical assistance on notifications.

The above are some of the key issues that had emerged in our discussion. I am certain that Trinidad and Tobago's delegation will take into account, and further reflect on, the many constructive comments, both broad and detailed, that they have received during this Review. Trinidad and Tobago has provided answers to all the advance written questions submitted prior to the meeting, and this has been highly appreciated by Members. This TPR will be successfully concluded once Trinidad and Tobago has replied to any follow up questions that emerged during the meeting in a month's time.