Concluding remarks by the Chairperson

The first Trade Policy Review of Samoa has provided us an excellent opportunity to deepen our understanding of Samoa's economic and trade policies since its accession to the WTO in 2012. More than 70 written questions were submitted by Members and 19 delegations took the floor, and this reflects Members' interest in Samoa's trade and investment policies.

My sincere thanks go to the Samoan delegation, led by the Honourable Lautafi Fio Selafi PURCELL, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour, for its active participation in this exercise. I would also like to thank H.E. Dr. David Walker, Ambassador of New Zealand, for his insightful remarks as discussant.

Members praised Samoa for the overall good performance of the economy, with an annual GDP growth rate of close to 2% in the period 2012-18. The economy proved resilient in the face of the devastation caused by cyclones Evan in 2012 and Gita in 2018, as well as the closure of the country's largest manufacturing plant in 2017. Members recognized that Samoa faces major challenges in achieving higher economic growth and attracting more investment, owing to its remoteness and small domestic market, and vulnerability to natural disasters.

Members commended Samoa on its commitment to engage in an open, non-discriminatory and transparent multilateral trading system. They invited it to further enhance its participation in the WTO, by fulfilling outstanding notification obligations in areas such as agriculture, customs valuation, and SPS and TBT measures. It was noted that Samoa was the first Pacific Island WTO Member to ratify the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2016. Members welcomed Samoa's active participation in the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies and its sponsorship of the MC11 Ministerial Statement on Fossil Fuels Subsidies Reform, and of the Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment.

Members congratulated Samoa on the reforms undertaken since its accession, in areas such as customs legislation and clearance procedures; taxation; SPS legislation; and competition policy. They also welcomed the reforms aimed at strengthening its IP regime and joining certain WIPO treaties, while recognizing Samoa's recent accession to the International Registration of Marks Protocol of the Madrid Agreement. The Samoan delegation noted that ongoing structural reforms focus on, amongst others, improving the business environment, financial inclusion, and enhancing the governance and performance of state-owned enterprises.

Members noted that Samoa is a party to the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA), and benefits from preferences granted by Australia and New Zealand under the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement (SPARTECA). In response to questions, Samoa informed Members that it is due to ratify the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus) between the Forum Island Countries, and Australia and New Zealand, by June 2019.

Members noted that the average applied MFN tariff rate of 11.5% in 2018 is virtually unchanged since Samoa's WTO accession in 2012. However, some Members invited Samoa to reduce the tariff peaks in its Customs tariff. The Samoan delegation announced that the HS 2017 nomenclature would be introduced this year. Several Members noted with concern that the applied tariff rates on certain products appear to exceed Samoa's tariff bindings, and encouraged it to bring these tariff lines into compliance with its scheduled WTO commitments. Some Members sought clarification regarding the implementation of the planned 20% excise tax on food items with a high fat, sugar or salt content.

In their oral interventions and written questions, Members sought clarification from Samoa on a number of issues, including: the SPS import list maintained by the Samoa Quarantine Services; its intention to join the Agreement on Government Procurement as an observer; price control policy; FDI restrictions maintained on fishing; regulatory challenges regarding Money Transfer Operators; and the regulatory regime for offshore financial services providers. Members also showed interest in Samoa's fisheries policies; efforts to diversify the export base; the economic benefits of the new submarine cables; and progress in the economic empowerment of Samoan women.

In conclusion, Members encouraged Samoa to maintain its generally open trade and investment policies, and supported its efforts to continually improve its business environment. Samoa was reminded that a WTO-consistent trade and investment regime should help it achieve its own development goals. The need for technical assistance to enhance Samoa's institutional capacity was widely recognized.

Members welcomed that this first Trade Policy Review of Samoa provided an opportunity to assess progress to date and identify areas of further work and reform. I hope that the Samoan delegation will further reflect on the issues raised, and on the many constructive comments that it received during this Review. In closing, I would like to thank the Samoan delegation, the discussant and all the other delegations that participated. This Trade Policy Review will be successfully concluded within a month, once Samoa has responded to any outstanding questions.