



Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery

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CARIBBEAN TRADE MINISTERS PLAN FOR WTO MINISTERIAL

CHRIST CHURCH, BARBADOS – Caribbean Trade Ministers meeting in Barbados yesterday (November 19), in preparation for the Sixth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference, which will take place in Hong Kong December 13 to 18, emphasized that unless development issues are given prominence in the negotiating agenda, the Ministerial is not likely to end in agreement. This is fundamental for small, vulnerable Caribbean countries.

The development dimension of the Doha Round is vitally important for the Caribbean, but continues to be neglected in the negotiating agenda. Success for the Doha Round must be gauged by how effectively the interests of the most vulnerable WTO Members, as measured against poverty and small size, are addressed. Whether or not the Caribbean joins in any consensus at Hong Kong will hinge on whether the legitimate interests of these small, vulnerable economies are adequately reflected in the negotiating agenda. The Region is firmly of the view that it must not be worse off at the end of the Round than when it commenced.

Ministers expressed regret that so close to the Ministerial Conference, the European Union has not been able to adopt a tariff for imports of Bananas from Latin American countries, and expressed deep concern with the decision of Honduras to place Bananas on the agenda of the Hong Kong Ministerial. Together, these developments could jeopardize the continued export of Caribbean bananas to the EU market, and prospects for the outcome of the year-end WTO Ministerial.

Ministers reiterated concerns, shared with other Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Sugar Protocol countries, that the current proposals by the European Commission for reform of the Sugar Regime, if adopted in their present form, would have devastating consequences for vulnerable economies and lead to severe social and economic dislocation and an increase in poverty. Ministers emphasized that they would be paying close attention to the outcome of the deliberations of the EU Agriculture Council, and stressed that any decision on reform of the Sugar Regime that did not adequately take into account the legitimate interests of Caribbean sugar producing countries could also influence their disposition towards the several issues to be addressed.

Ministers underscored that they are not prepared to compromise on the preservation of long-standing preferences, flexibility to designate an appropriate number of products as Special Products and the need to develop meaningful provisions in this regard, advancing the Special Safeguard Mechanism without onerous conditions being placed on its use, better access in the area of Services supply, a development facilitating formula for Agricultural market access and Non-Agricultural Market Access and more generally Special and Differential Treatment (S&D) - in which no substantive progress has been made since the Fifth WTO Ministerial. Substantive progress must be made on agreement-specific S&D proposals at Hong Kong.

While welcoming the *Aid for Trade initiative*, of the US and EU, the Caribbean is of the view that the target beneficiaries should explicitly include small, vulnerable economies.

Ministers expressed deep concern that development issues are still not finding expression in WTO talks, less than a month before the convening of the key WTO Ministerial. The Caribbean has repeatedly affirmed its support for WTO talks, but there are grave misgivings about how they are being conducted.

Ministers reaffirmed that the Caribbean is prepared to work with like-minded groups on specific issues of mutual concern and importance, to advance Doha Round negotiations in a manner that upholds the development dimension.

Barbados' Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Dame Billie Miller chaired yesterday's Thirteenth Special Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) on External Trade Negotiations. In addition to Trade Ministers, the Secretary General of CARICOM H.E. Edwin Carrington, Director General of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) Ambassador Dr. Richard Bernal, Geneva and Brussels-based Caribbean diplomats, Senior Capital-based Officials from CARICOM countries as well as Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and officials from the RNM, CARICOM and OECS Secretariats also participated in the meeting. In preparation for the Special Meeting of COTED, a meeting of senior trade officials took place in Barbados, November 17 to 18.

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