

**CARICOM Statement on the occasion of the  
Natural Disasters and Trade Symposium  
10 May 2019**

**Check Against Delivery**

---

Thank you Chair.

This statement is being delivered on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Group.

The topic of this Symposium is of great interest to the Member States of CARICOM and we are grateful for the opportunity to participate in a discussion on the interplay between natural disasters and trade. In light of our exposure to the negative effects of climate change and our predisposition to natural disasters, we wish to use this opportunity to promote greater awareness among the membership of the WTO of the adverse effects of natural disasters on trade. Natural disasters have become more frequent in recent times and their impact more severe in terms of loss of life and damage to infrastructure.

In the Caribbean the 2017 hurricane season ushered in a record number of six consecutive hurricanes which accounted for US\$ 229 billion in damage, resulting in significant economic losses across the region. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti is another example of how natural disasters can decimate economies and curtail years of development efforts. The destruction of the economies of territories in CARICOM provides a clear illustration of the substantial threat and impact of natural disasters on

our trade with the global community. In the case of Dominica after Hurricane Maria in September 2017, destruction was estimated at over 200 percent of GDP.

The Caribbean region is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and comprehensive solutions are needed to treat with the harmful effects of these phenomena on trade. It is essential for us to be afforded special treatment beyond what is now offered under existing WTO rules. It is evident that small vulnerable economies need flexibilities corresponding to existing vulnerabilities. In an effort to help affected Members rebuild and revive growth and development, we call on Members to work towards establishing mechanisms that could be activated subsequent to a catastrophic natural disaster that provide the necessary policy space to achieve recovery in the shortest possible time.

It is no secret that Caribbean countries are among the most vulnerable nations in terms of natural disasters. CARICOM supports the crafting of rules that promote the building of economic and trade resilience in small island developing states. We wish to recall the proposal of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, which was put forward at the Eleventh Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, in 2017. CARICOM agrees that WTO rules and disciplines must not stand in the way of reconstruction. The full flexibility of the multilateral trading system should be deployed so that reconstruction measures taken by affected Members will be deemed compatible with the WTO Agreements.

Thank you.