Shishir Priyadarshi, Director, Development Division, welcomed participants. The aim of the fourth Symposium was to communicate a substantive piece of research on natural disasters and trade. Two reports had been drafted and were being published as drafts with a deadline of 31 December 2019 for comments. Executive summaries of the two reports were available on the WTO website, alongside the full versions of both studies.

Mr Priyadarshi expressed his thanks to the Mission of Australia for its financial support for the project. He acknowledged the support received from Members, in particular the six disaster-affected Members surveyed, and also thanked the World Customs Organization (WCO), World Bank (WBG) and UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) for agreeing to act as discussants.

Setting the stage for the discussion, he began his remarks by asking two questions: "Why discuss natural disasters in a trade context?", and "How can trade measures interact with natural disasters?". Natural disasters impacted the exports and imports of disaster-affected Members and these effects in turn, spread through value chains. While large scale natural disasters received news coverage, many smaller, more frequent events went unreported. Natural disasters affected both trade in goods and services. Negative impacts occurred both as direct impacts, e.g. machinery damaged due to flooding, or as indirect effects, e.g. tourists opting for a different holiday destination.

He also highlighted how trade measures can interact with natural disasters. He recalled a point made at the first Symposium on natural disasters and trade in April 2018, that while hazards were natural, disasters were man-made. There was a range of actions that could, either unintentionally or deliberately, make it harder to respond to a disaster. Restrictions could hinder the ability of the trade system to balance out disaster events, and so magnify their impact. He underscored the importance of ensuring trade measures did not inhibit the inflow and outflow of goods and services in the event of a natural disaster.

Presentation of the reports

The first report was presented by Michael Roberts, Head, Aid-for-Trade Unit, WTO and Ankai Xu, Research Economist, Economic Research and Statistics Division, WTO.

Michael Roberts started his presentation by evoking a quote from Elhadj As Sy, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Secretary General, "shocks and hazards may be natural but disasters depend on us". The presence of a natural hazard did not automatically equate with a natural disaster. Other factors, namely exposure and vulnerability, came into play.

He illustrated how comparable hazards could produce different impacts by discussing three earthquakes (i.e. those in Chile, New Zealand, Haiti between 2010-2011) which had all been at the extreme end of the Richter scale. The damage and loss of life incurred had varied significantly across the three countries. While the reported damage in monetary terms was highest in New Zealand and Chile, Haiti reported the highest number of deaths and damage when measured in relation to GDP. The location of the earthquake close to the major city in Haiti meant that many more people were exposed to the hazard. This exposure combined with vulnerability, due to unplanned urbanization, low income and poor building standards, had resulted in a high number of casualties.

Discussing the frequency of disasters, he noted that geophysical events (e.g. earthquakes) tended to occur more or less consistently – although the location and magnitude of events could not be predicted with accuracy. The frequency of hydro-meteorological events had been following an upward trend, resulting from natural and man-made climate change increasing both the frequency and intensity of disasters. Exposure to disasters was dynamic, not static. The same was also true of vulnerability to disaster risk that influenced decisions on where to locate assets, how they were built and the type of economic activities undertaken. Through technology (e.g. warning systems) and better preparedness, the number of deaths recorded had been steadily falling year-on-year. Building techniques and international standards could also help reduce vulnerability further.
Looking across different regions, the highest number of natural disasters was reported in Asia. However, in terms of the value of the damages incurred, America and Asia were almost comparable. This value of damage recorded in both Oceania and in Africa was significantly lower, due both to lower asset values, under-reporting or lack of capacity to capture economic impacts.

The indicators used to capture economic losses from natural disaster produced quite different perspectives. Larger and more diversified economies (i.e. U.S, China, India, Japan) incurred the highest loss in absolute terms, but lower values when measured as a percentage of GDP. Smaller economies (i.e. Dominica, Vanuatu) tended to face higher economic losses as a percentage to GDP. The amount of time between disasters had also been taken into account in considering the damage, as frequently occurring events acted as a brake on development. He noted that among those countries in the United Nations category of Small Island Developing States, International Monetary Fund (IMF) research had identified the Caribbean as being particularly severely affected by natural disasters. Past trends also highlighted that disasters tended not to happen in isolation, but rather interacted with broader economic trends. For example, following the global downturn in the 2008-9 financial crisis, Paraguay’s economy had further suffered a major drought in 2011. The drought caused a contraction in economic activity and output comparable in size to that of the financial crisis.

Ankai Xu began her presentation by discussing how trade was affected by natural disasters. Natural disasters and trade interacted in complex, and often unexpected ways. From the macroeconomic perspective, a natural disaster generated economic destruction and delivered a shock to the aggregate supply curve, resulting in a decline in real output and employment. One important function that trade performed was that of a "shock-absorber" for natural disasters. Imports provided a vital channel for making goods and services available that would otherwise be in short supply in a disaster-struck country. Such goods and services included food, medical supplies, emergency equipment and expertise to aid relief and recovery efforts. Insurance and international reinsurance, for example, could help absorb the losses from natural disasters and sometimes shift the burden of disaster response and recovery from the government to the private sector.

She discussed the "vicious cycle" of natural disasters. Natural disasters caused output and export to decline because of the damage to export-oriented companies and trade-related infrastructure (i.e. ports, airports, roads, customs offices, telecommunications). Countries could then experience a sharp deterioration in their trade balance, which resulted in rising public debt. Sluggish export recovery could constrain a country's ability to recover from a natural disaster, adding further financial pressure. Vulnerable small developing economies tended to get caught in this "vicious cycle" especially when natural disasters happened so frequently that they are unable to recover from one before the next one hit them.

From a sectoral point of view, she noted the negative impact that floods and droughts exerted on countries highly concentrated on agricultural exports. The 2010 flood in Pakistan and 2008-2011 drought in Kenya had both caused large losses in crops and livestock. Natural disasters could also lead to a decline in services exports by an average of two to three per cent. This figure was likely to be an underestimate because many developing countries did not report services trade data. Capital intensive services sectors such as transportation and communication were the most affected by natural disasters. Tourism, an important sector for small economies, tended to shrink after a natural disaster due to infrastructure damage and perceived risk.

She pointed to the case of Japan’s earthquake to illustrate the impact natural disasters could have on private consumption, supply chains, the economy of disaster-affected countries, and the trade performance of partner countries. She highlighted the importance of international efforts to tackle or minimize the impacts of natural disasters. To strengthen the resilience of supply chains, she recommended enhanced multi-sectoral cooperation, better information sharing among countries, developing and adopting international standards, and the use of risk assessment tools.

Michael Roberts further elaborated on insights from an analysis of trade policy reviews (TPRs) undertaken in the period from January 2010 to September 2019. Of the 172 TPRs conducted in this period, 31% referred to a natural disaster. A number of references were to the trade effects of a natural disaster taking place in another WTO Member (e.g. the impact of the Thai floods on Japanese companies), and underscored how impacts propagated through global value chains. The type of disaster most commonly referred to in TPRs over this period was drought. References to floods, storms, earthquakes and volcanoes also appeared.
Various policy measures taken by Members for disaster response, recovery, and resilience also appeared in the TPRs. Response actions included trade measures on customs, VAT exemptions, temporary tariff reductions, and export restrictions. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, the Chinese Government had temporarily reduced import tariffs for a number of food products. Another example was a Central American Member that had imposed export restrictions and import quotas to maintain domestic supply and the availability of certain essential food items in response to a prolonged drought. Measures imposing price controls on essential services or goods were reported in several TPRs, as well as support measures for farmers and fishermen, and MSMEs. Measures to boost resilience such as the purchase of drought-resistant varietals of food crops, updating of food security laws, new public stock holding for food security schemes, mandatory insurance coverage, and the maintenance of foreign exchange reserves were also reported.

A second report was presented by Giovanna Adinolfi, Professor, University of Milan. It focused on a legal mapping that explored the scope under the WTO Agreements for Members to take measures in support of disaster response, recovery, and resilience.

WTO rules had been drawn with commercial cross-border transactions in mind. However, the scope of rights and obligations under WTO Agreements covered both commercial and non-commercial exchanges e.g. disaster relief. In disaster response, the primary concern was to facilitate the availability of both goods, equipment, services, and personnel to provide immediate assistance to an affected community.

Professor Adinolfi explored the many ways in which trade measures under WTO Agreement can support disaster response, with particular reference to the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Simplification of customs processes and procedures under TFA for regular commercial transactions could generate positive impacts by speeding up and facilitating the entry of relief goods and equipment. Measures included pre-arrival submission of documentation and release of goods prior to the final determination of customs charges. Moreover, rights and flexibilities under GATT 1994 could justify the (discriminatory) suspension of customs charges on the entry of relief items, therefore lowering the costs of foreign and international assistance for certain actors. Other important provisions concerned provisions on traffic in transit and border agency cooperation. Provisions on transit were of particular value for landlocked countries hit by natural disasters.

Disaster-affected countries frequently found themselves caught between two opposing forces. One was the need to facilitate the immediate entry of relief items. The other was the obligation to control the quality and the safety of these products (in accordance with the TBT and SPS Agreements). Basing national measures on international standards (where they exist and are relevant) could help to strike a balance between control and facilitation by speeding up conformity assessment procedures. Custom facilities and regulations designed with the purpose of accelerating regular commercial transactions would also have a positive impact on relief items.

From a trade partner’s perspective, concerns could arise over the quality and safety of products exported by a country in the aftermath of a natural disaster. As such, a disaster-affected country could need assistance to rebuild quality infrastructure and to demonstrate compliance with the technical regulations or sanitary measures of trading partners.

Disaster-affected countries also needed access to goods of primary necessity. Access to food could be facilitated through both domestic and foreign programs. Domestic measures included Green Box measures under the Agreement on Agriculture, such as public stockholding for food security purposes and domestic food aid schemes. Trade partners could provide support through schemes that conformed with the terms of the International Food Aid Convention.

Finding a balance between ensuring the competence of foreign relief personnel and facilitating their entry was a further consideration for disaster-affected countries – a point that referred to the provisions relating to recognition of foreign professional qualifications under the GATS. Services also played a role in facilitating access to financing. She noted the importance of mobile banking, services provided by banks and remittance services. Drawing the right balance was important because in some cases, regulations enforced to combat illicit or fraudulent practices (money laundering, tax evasion, corruption) created inadvertent obstacles that restricted access among disaster-affected populations to such services e.g. due to the withdrawal of correspondent banking services.
Subsidies played an important role in the disaster recovery phase. Professor Adinolfi outlined how WTO Agreements dealt with this issue. Agriculture frequently suffered significant losses from natural disasters, and this issue was addressed in the Agreement on Agriculture through a series of Green Boxes. She also noted that a subsidy within the meaning of the SCM Agreement was only subject to WTO law if it was specific in intent. Schemes that were objective in criteria, neutral in application, economic in nature and horizontal in application, (e.g. subsidies to micro, small and medium enterprises) would not fall within the scope of the SCM Agreement. Professor Adinolfi also suggested that the trading partners of disaster-affected Members should give due consideration to the recovery and reconstruction needs of a disaster-affected Member before engaging in SCM consultations. She further recommended that trading partners should consider requests for financial assistance under bilateral and multilateral development assistance agreements.

Provisions on prohibited subsidies also did not apply to LDC and some developing Members. Other subsidies only become actionable to the extent that other conditions set out in the SCM Agreement were satisfied. A Peace Clause on measures implemented by developing Members with a view to achieving legitimate development goals (2001 Ministerial Decision on Implementation-related issues and concerns) was relevant in this context. The question of whether or not the restoration of economic activities in a disaster-affected area qualified as a legitimate development objective was also important in this regard.

Preference schemes benefitting eligible disaster-affected Members could support export recovery. In this context, she mentioned the 1979 Enabling Clause and the 2005 and 2013 Ministerial Decisions on Duty-Free, Quota-Free market access for LDCs. She also highlighted how exposure to natural disaster or vulnerability was being taken into account in the LDC graduation process though deferral of graduation.

Professor Adinolfi mentioned the possibility to invoke balance of payments provisions under GATT 1994 to facilitate the reconstruction of an industry that has been substantially damaged by a natural disaster. To facilitate the entry of foreign products required for reconstruction, for example, it was also possible to suspend anti-dumping duties on imports of building materials. The disaster recovery phase could also involve subsidies for domestic services and services suppliers. While the GATS did not contain specific disciplines on subsidies, MFN and national treatment obligations in committed sectors still applied.

Public procurement was crucial to guarantee the availability of goods and services needed for recovery. Concerns in this area included the need for prompt procurement procedures, absence of domestic suppliers for many goods and services, and the need to avoid price speculation. These issues were better addressed ex ante, first by ensuring that the general framework for public procurement could be used as efficiently as possible. In that regard, "framework agreements" and special rules and procedures for emergencies were useful tools. She also highlighted the flexibilities provided for by the revised Government Procurement Agreement in disaster situation.

Trade rules also have a role to play in resilience by reducing disaster risks and losses through the implementation of measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability. With regard to trade in goods, the implementation of TFA and the IFRC Model Act were of relevance for customs and other border agency performance.

Professor Adinolfi highlighted the role that the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement would play in promoting the concept of "Build Back Better". Basing measures on performance criteria, rather than prescriptive characteristics as per Article 2.8 of the TBT Agreement would help support this approach.

For Members whose agricultural sector suffer persistent natural disaster damage, resilience could be promoted in accordance with Green Box provisions through the provision of general services, investment aids, environmental programs, participation in income safety net programs, etc.

To improve resilience in the area of services, mutual recognition of professional qualifications through agreed criteria was one option. Disaster preparedness also required critical services such as insurance and reinsurance services, and telecommunication services, among others. She stated that there was scope to consider further liberalization of these services. Weather-related services were also important in that information enabled individuals, households, businesses and governments to take decisions which reduced the impacts of natural hazards. Policy dialogue in this area could examine the implications on import policy for hydromet equipment and trade-related IP.
aspects, the role of public bodies under both GATS and Revised GPA, issues related to observational data, weather-related services and environmental services.

In her concluding remarks, Professor Adinolfi drew attention to the wide range of actions that can be taken in the context of trade and natural disaster across a broad section of WTO Agreements.

Concluding the remarks in this segment, the moderator, Shishir Priyadarshi, Director, Development Division, highlighted the pressure on public resources generated by natural disasters. International organizations and trading partners had a central role to play in the recovery phase. In an integrated world, the impact of a natural disaster in one country could propagate to others. He stressed the value of working towards a collective good in this area.

**Presentations by discussants**

**Vyara Filipova, Technical Attaché, World Customs Organization (WCO)** explained that customs authorities were the first governmental service that humanitarian responders interacted with in a disaster situation. Customs was on the frontline of disaster response. Customs authorities also played important roles in recovery and resilience action too. Customs was frequently identified as a major bottleneck especially in the response phase of a disaster, but criticism was not always fair, not least since delays were often the responsibility of other agencies operating at the border.

After a brief introduction of the WCO, she explained how the role of customs had evolved from simple revenue collection to that of protection of economic interests and the protection of society (e.g. from drug trafficking, firearms, environment, etc.). The scope of customs functions also now encompassed trade facilitation and the supply chain. WCO’s responsibilities included standard setting in the form of instruments, conventions, guidelines and compendia. Another function was capacity building which included technical assistance and cooperation with other international organizations.

Ms Filipova noted that there was great pressure placed on government agencies of disaster-affected countries, including customs, to ensure that aid reached victims in a timely manner. International humanitarian response had historically been managed by UN agencies. While the UN was still active, it had now been joined by a large number of NGOs and other actors that did not regularly interact with customs – a situation that created risks for both parties. A particular issue in this regard was unsolicited bilateral donations. It was essential that a Member requesting international assistance come up with a list of priority items. This would help the humanitarian responders understand what type of items were needed. It would also assist government agencies, including customs, in identifying items that should be given priority attention.

Another relevant issue was a lack of relevant knowledge and experience on the part of some humanitarian operators. Customs clearance issues could arise due to poor documentation. Simplified procedures were designed to ensure a speedy delivery of relief consignments, but sometimes these procedures were misused. Customs also faced challenges in having to enforce legislation on behalf of other government agencies – which underscored the benefits of coordinated border management.

WCO had developed several instruments to address these issues. These included a chapter on relief consignments and facilitation measures in the revised Kyoto Convention. In 2011, a resolution had been adopted on the role of customs in disaster relief, that included provision for cooperation with UNOCHA and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Another recent initiative was the C-RED (Customs for release of epidemic diseases) project, which addressed epidemic outbreaks (e.g. Ebola in West Africa). WCO also had tools and initiatives focusing on border management, such as the SAFE package that included trade recovery guidelines. Tools on business continuity planning were also available.

**Pierre Sauvè, Senior Trade Specialist, World Bank Group**, highlighted the importance of ensuring coherence by looking at natural disasters from a trade perspective. Coherence was needed for countries to be able to anticipate, mitigate, withstand, and then recover from the increasing proclivity of natural disasters. This was the logic behind the WTO’s research work. There was a need to ensure that the international community put in place the proper co-operation mechanisms, dialogue channels, and alert systems to ensure timely and supportive response.

For trade to play a supportive role in natural disasters, markets had to be open. Trade openness was at the core of resilience. Trade could play a very significant role in scaling up resilience by ensuring that countries have at their disposal building materials and engineering techniques that
were adapted to the hazards they faced. Trade was not only about exporting, but also importing because an economy could not produce everything it needed. In situations of natural disasters, access to imports assumed even more critical importance, especially for countries who had vulnerabilities and exposure to recurring risk. Trade openness was needed to restore normalcy.

There were many flexibilities available in WTO Agreements. Flexibility was linked to the exercise of policy space and special and differential treatment in the form of exemptions from WTO rules. Flexibility in the context of a disaster needed to be viewed in a slightly different way though not least due to urgency. Such flexibility could include temporary liberalization. This was a way to signal commitment, albeit temporary or exceptional in nature, that commensurated with the need to handle the challenge of imports to remedy both physical and infrastructural damage.

Situations of natural disasters sometimes called for flexibilities. There were provisions in the loan agreements that World Bank accords its borrowers to draw down on funding to have quick disbursements in situations of extreme need. Building the ability on the trade side was incumbent on the financial response that the international community provided to countries which experienced these challenges. Many developing countries in recent years had seen debt levels increase given access to capital markets at very low interest rates – a phenomenon which had soon been followed by an economic crisis.

The financial community had been creative in developing all sorts of instruments that would help countries anticipate and mitigate the hazards. There had been significant financial innovation in recent years. For economic agents in disaster-at-risk countries to be able to access these resources, there had to be some degree of openness and financial market liberalization, some degree of access to services, and a degree of prudential regulatory capacity to allow services to be used. The World Bank was working with its clients to promote economic diversification so that when a natural disaster hit, the economy had more resilience.

Natural disasters were often caused by a lack of resilient infrastructure. Power shortages occurred regularly in developing countries. These power outages hampered economic activity. It was important to focus on resilience not only against large natural disasters, but also more frequent lesser impact events. The return on investment was calculated by the World Bank at four dollars of net benefits generated for every one dollar invested in resilient infrastructure. In conclusion, Mr Sauvé called on the global community to work together by investing in resilience.

Irina Zodrow, Programme Officer, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, recalled remarks made by UN Secretary General that little undermined development like a disaster. For many of the world's poorest countries and most vulnerable communities, disasters continued to reverse development gains, undermine resilience, exacerbate inequality, and curtail prospects for economic growth. She quoted IMF research in explaining why climate risk was a priority. In entering the age of adaptation and disaster management, the right investments would deliver triple dividends by averting future losses, spurring economic gains, and delivering social and environmental benefits to everyone, particularly those currently affected and most at risk.

There was currently no system in place to accurately account for disaster losses. For example, slow onset disasters were not necessarily reflected in statistics. Current statistics did not fully capture what was happening, and underestimated losses. Natural disasters were not only a developing country issue. She highlighted that insurance companies in New Zealand now refused to provide insurance in certain locations due to changes in the risk landscape. She noted the importance of correctly accounting for hidden externalities that are caused by risks in the trading system. This requires continuing efforts from the World Bank, the WTO and the IMF. The task force for climate-related financial disclosure was starting to examine ways to make risk more transparent. Financial regulators were calling for more risk mitigation measures.

She stressed the importance of moving from a response-based to a prevention-based approach that considered climate and disaster risk comprehensively. The Sendai Framework aimed to strengthen resilience to ease the negative effects of natural and man-made hazards. An innovative approach was needed because data on past events was no longer a good indicator of future risk. With risks becoming systemic in nature, it was critical to make risk-informed decisions and investments. Rising disaster losses risked exceeding what feasibly could be afforded. However, at the same time, current policies, institutions, and financing were still looking mainly to prepare and respond to disasters rather than reduce losses. A reactive approach would lead to perpetuation of disaster risks.
The Sendai Framework was a global blueprint for risk reduction, with the goal to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks. The Framework included targets to reduce global disaster mortality, the number of affected people, direct economic loss in relation to GDP, damage to critical infrastructure and disruption to basic services. It also targeted an increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies, and greater availability of multi-hazard early warning systems. National strategies should be developed coherently, taking into account disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and trade. Ninety trillion US dollars would be invested in infrastructure by 2030 with 70% expected to be channeled into low and middle income countries whose societies and economies were typically more exposed to climate and disaster risks. She reiterated the need to ensure that this investment was risk-informed. She also emphasized the value disaster risk reduction had since disasters often struck across national boundaries. She suggested continuing the dialogue to examine how trade could help disaster risk reduction.

Comments on the research

The representative of Barbados stated that the research was essential for small island developing states. The delegation sought further clarification on the different ways the WTO could help strengthen the resilience phase of disaster risk management.

The representative of Mozambique shared some insights into the long-lasting impacts of the natural disasters that had hit her country. These were compounded by a lack of capacity and resources needed for reconstruction. She noted the rise of natural disasters in recent years and the economic losses incurred. To that end, her delegation supported an open rules-based trading system which could support resilience in the face of natural disasters. She suggested continuing discussions to find ways at the WTO to tailor trade policy measures to support disaster risk reduction. Technical assistance was needed to help disaster-prone countries take substantive measures given their limited capacity. One suggestion she made was to organize national and regional workshops to engage stakeholders, including governments and the private sector, to raise awareness and support work in this area. She encouraged donors to allocate resources so as to extend the work to other disaster-affected countries and to disseminate the research results.

The representative of Bangladesh expressed appreciation to the WTO for organizing the Symposium. His comment related to the complementarity of technology transfer and critical services for disaster risk management in the context of the TRIPS Agreement.

The representative of Vanuatu thanked Australia for funding this initiative. He highlighted issues identified in the research including on recovering trade losses from natural disasters, debt management, and ensuring that trade rules were supportive to reconstruction. He recalled the importance of building resilience through the adoption of standards, enforcing building code and fostering greater cooperation across agencies. Responding to the challenges of natural disasters in a trade context, the delegation suggested exploring the possibility of amending GATT Article XX and the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures Agreement so as to allow subsidies needed in certain sectors for recovery. Other areas he suggested to explore included the possibility of adopting waivers or deferral of the WTO Membership contribution, and to revisit the idea raised by Bangladesh on technology transfer in relation to Article 66 on TRIPS. His delegation placed an emphasis on ensuring WTO rules did not stand in the way of the reconstruction process.

Speaking on behalf of CARICOM, the representative of Trinidad and Tobago underscored the serious threat that natural disasters pose for Caribbean economies. He recalled the devastating impacts of Hurricane Dorian on the Bahamas. Even though the hurricane season was drawing to a close, CARICOM Member States remained vulnerable to external shocks and the negative impacts of climate change. The delegation welcomed this initiative and the legal mapping undertaken to better understand the scope currently exists in WTO agreements to allow Members to take measures in respect of disaster response, recovery, and resilience. The delegation reiterated the need for the existing eligibility to be maintained and expressed concern at proposals to tie future special and differential treatment to the metric of per capita income. Given CARICOM economies' vulnerability to exogenous shocks, he raised concerns about the high level of debt, eligibility for concessional financing, and underscored the continuing need for special and differential treatment. The delegation recalled the proposal made by CARICOM for the full flexibility of the multilateral trading system to be granted for reconstruction measures by disaster-affected Members.

The representative of Jamaica commended the WTO on the Symposium. His delegation shared some insights into the economic damages borne by Jamaica after Hurricanes Ivan and Dean, which
had left a devastating impact on tourism, agriculture, and industry. Given the importance of trade to Jamaica's economy, the delegation reiterated its support for the multilateral trading system and highlighted the importance of the link between natural disasters and trade. He highlighted the need for special and differential treatment, adapting trade measures (e.g. TFA, GATT) to facilitate entry of relief goods and services, low cost and flexible financing, climate financing, investments in renewable energy, collaboration with the private sector, further support from development financing partners, and fostering greater synergies across different international organizations in this area.

The representative of Australia highlighted the wide scope under WTO rules for disaster-affected Members and their trading partners to respond and recover from natural disasters. Since the Pacific was one of the most disaster-prone regions globally, Australia actively engaged with its neighbouring countries and used its development assistance to increase resilience. There was potential to advance policies which supported disaster resilience and mitigated the impact of disasters before they occurred. He underlined a few messages emerging from the report including the importance of customs cooperation, prompt clearance of goods, compliance with international standards, mutual recognition of services’ qualifications, pre-establishment of measures to respond to disasters (e.g. through waivers on relief goods). This research also highlighted areas where further work in the organization or elsewhere might be relevant. He encouraged Members and other stakeholders to build on the research work, including through technical assistance and Aid-for-Trade programs.

In reply, the panellists provided comments on the role of different stakeholders (private sector, regional development banks, etc), technology transfer (especially in backbone services sectors) and public-private cooperation. The speakers supported continued efforts to make the case on why trade plays such an important role in resilience. Concluding the Symposium, the moderator, Michael Roberts, highlighted that it was now for WTO Members to decide if and how to take the research insights forward.