



Committee on Trade Facilitation

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRADE FACILITATION AND THE DEDICATED SESSION ON ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING 15-16 OCTOBER 2019

CHAIR: HE MR MOHAMMAD QURBAN HAQJO (AFGHANISTAN)

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1 REGULAR COMMITTEE SESSION

A. MATTERS RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT

1.1. The Chair welcomed delegations to the meeting of the Trade Facilitation Committee (TF Committee, Committee, or TFC). He recalled that the proposed agenda had been circulated in WTO/AIR/TFA/9/Rev.1, which indicated that the regular Committee session would be followed by a dedicated exchange on technical assistance and support for capacity building. The meeting was joined by 50 capital-based officials, as well as the Minister of Economy of El Salvador, H.E. Ms. Maria Luisa Hayem, and H.E. Mr. Ajmal Ahmady, Minister of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan.

1.2. The delegate of Uruguay requested to include an item under "Other Business".

1.3. The agenda was adopted with the addition requested by Uruguay.

NOTIFICATIONS BY MEMBERS

1.4. The Chair informed the Committee that a total of 87 new notifications had been received since the Committee's last meeting on 25 June 2019. All notifications had been issued as documents in the G/TFA/N series.

Notifications under Articles 15 and 16 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

1.5. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to first group of notifications, namely those under Articles 15 and 16 of the Agreement. Since the last meeting of the Committee, 56 notifications had been received from 48 Members. The notifications were introduced in alphabetical order of Members, as listed on the airgram.

1.6. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Antigua and Barbuda (G/TFA/N/ATG/1).

1.7. The delegate of the United States thanked Antigua and Barbuda for its notification. She noted that Article 10.6.2 had been included in category A and therefore, she urged them to provide the relevant information to the Secretariat.

1.8. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Bangladesh (G/TFA/N/BGD/2).

1.9. The delegate of Bangladesh said that they had notified their category C provisions on 20 August 2019. The notification contained 13 items, and Bangladesh had received responses from donors on eight of them. Bangladesh expected that donors would come forward and provide aid to implement the remaining five provisions.

1.10. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Barbados (G/TFA/N/BRB/1/Add.1).

1.11. The delegate of Barbados said that the cabinet had met on 17 August 2019 to approve the notification of the definitive dates and technical assistance for category C provisions. The latest notification improved the original one, as it showed that thirteen provisions had been shifted from category C to category B. This was a testament to Barbados' commitment to the WTO and its principles, particularly special and differential treatment. Barbados called on developed countries and developing countries in a position to do so, to provide the appropriate technical assistance and capacity building at the levels required for sustainable development and implementation of the various provisions.

1.12. Barbados believed it was in every country's interest to implement the TFA and that the principles of self-designation of implementation should remain an essential tenet of the agreement. Flexibilities should be shown to all developing countries but particularly to small vulnerable economies and least-developed countries (LDCs), where there were already proven capacity constraints.

1.13. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from Belize (G/TFA/N/BLZ/1/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/BLZ/1/Add.1/Corr.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.14. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Cabo Verde (G/TFA/N/CPV/1).

1.15. The delegate of the United States thanked Cabo Verde for the notification and asked if Cabo Verde had any updates concerning the timeline for ratification of the TFA.

1.16. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Cameroon (G/TFA/N/CMR/1).

1.17. The delegate of the United States thanked Cameroon for the notification on category B. She expressed concern at the lack of definitive dates and technical assistance and capacity building needs for category C. She also recalled that Cameroon had notified Article 10.6.2 in category A, and she urged them to make the information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.18. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from China (G/TFA/N/CHN/1/Add.3). There were no comments from Members.

1.19. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Congo (G/TFA/N/COG/1).

1.20. The delegate of the United States thanked Congo for the notification. She noted that Article 10.6.2 had been notified in category A and encouraged Congo to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.21. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from Costa Rica (G/TFA/N/CRI/1/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/CRI/1/Add.1/Corr.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.22. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Côte d'Ivoire (G/TFA/N/CIV/1).

1.23. The delegate of Côte d'Ivoire said that since 30 July 2019, Côte d'Ivoire had notified three measures under category B and 18 measures under category C. This showed that Côte d'Ivoire had clear needs for technical assistance. The delegate thanked USAID and the World Bank for their continued support, and he went on to request further support for the implementation of the TFA. There were several different projects for the future that would improve the workings of the Agreement in the country.

1.24. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Cuba (G/TFA/N/CUB/1/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/CUB/2).

1.25. The delegate of Cuba said that Articles 1.3 (Enquiry Points) and 10.4 (Single Window) had initially been notified in category C, but Article 1.3 had been shifted to category B, under the provisions of Article 19 of the TFA. Because of the prevailing conditions in Cuba, which their Ambassador had explained at length during the recent Heads of Delegations meeting, Cuba had found it difficult to access technical assistance and capacity building being provided by some of the Annex D organizations. In 2014, an official request had been made to UNCTAD for the development of a project on the implementation of the strategy for the development of the single window. After an effort to acquire the relevant financial resources, the European Union had agreed to finance the proposal, for which the delegate expressed their gratitude. Since then, the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Investment, with support from UNCTAD, had drafted a timeline to document, clarify and simplify the procedures of registration, prior certification and release. Training had also been received from UNCTAD experts. In March 2018, authorization had been received to use the e-Registration system, hosted in a national server. The most significant achievement in 2019 had been to finalize documentation for the platform as a result of the technical assistance received. Currently, the platform documented 125 laws and regulations and 108 procedures from 41 national entities.

1.26. Cuba wanted to underscore that developed Members made a commitment to provide assistance to all developing countries and LDCs but in the current situation, many bilateral donors privileged certain countries and regions based on their own interests. Cuba was not opposed to this, but it placed the Annex D organizations in a very difficult position because they received funds from certain donor countries but were limited in their ability to offer their services and knowledge to all member-states which required them. This trend, if continued, would mean that developing countries that were not favoured with this type of support would face difficulties to implement their category C provisions which would make it necessary to change their definitive dates of implementation.

1.27. The Chair directed Members' attention to the notification from Djibouti (G/TFA/N/DJI/1).

1.28. The delegate of the United States thanked Djibouti for their notification. The United States noted that Article 10.6.2 had been included in category A, and therefore they looked forward to Djibouti making the information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.29. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Dominica (G/TFA/N/DMA/1/Add.1).

1.30. The delegate of the United States thanked Dominica for their notification. She noted that Articles 1.4 and 10.6.2 had been included in category A and she encouraged Dominica to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.31. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from the Dominican Republic (G/TFA/N/DOM/1/Add.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.32. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Ecuador (G/TFA/N/ECU/1/Add.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.33. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Egypt (G/TFA/N/EGY/1).

1.34. The delegate of Egypt recalled that Egypt had ratified the TFA on 24 June 2019, and that the concerned notification had been submitted on 18 June 2019. The document included additional category A commitments, as well as categories B and C commitments, including definitive dates for category B and C provisions. In addition, Egypt had presented information on customs brokers (Article 10.6.2) in document G/TFA/N/EGY/2.

1.35. The delegate highlighted some of the actions Egypt had undertaken to promote trade facilitation. The National Trade Facilitation Committee had been established by Ministerial Decree no. 183/2011, with participation from competent authorities from the public and private sector. The Committee had played an important role during the TFA negotiations phase and after MC9 the work had focused on TFA implementation issues, including the identification of assistance and capacity-building needs. There would also be a new set of rules to reduce the number of documents required for import and export transit actions. In addition, efforts were underway to implement a national single window to facilitate electronic communication among all control authorities concerned with the cross-border trade. Further action was taking place to redraft and update the customs law for consistency with the TFA and rapid changes in international trade. Finally, Egypt asserted its full commitment to the implementation of its obligations under the TFA, including those included in category C. Donor countries were appreciated, as well as the WTO and other international organizations for their cooperation and support. Egypt aspired to further cooperation in order to fully enable them to meet their obligations.

1.36. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Eswatini (G/TFA/N/SWZ/1/Add.2). There were no comments from Members.

1.37. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Fiji (G/TFA/N/FJI/1/Add.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.38. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Gabon (G/TFA/N/GAB/1). There were no comments from Members.

1.39. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from Ghana (G/TFA/N/GHA/1 and G/TFA/N/GHA/1/Add.1).

1.40. The delegate of Ghana said that they had notified their commitments under categories B and C, as well as the corresponding definitive dates. Of those commitments, 23 had been allocated under category C, with the expectation that adequate technical assistance and capacity building support would be made available in a timely and effective manner to meet the scheduled commitments. However, there had been no engagements with donors thus far and consequently no positive results.

1.41. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Grenada (G/TFA/N/GRD/1/Add.1).

1.42. The delegate of Grenada said that the notification contained provisions in category C, their definitive dates, and technical assistance and capacity building requirements. He thanked the World Bank and UNCTAD for their support in the implementation of measures in category C. Grenada hoped to continue to receive more capacity building and technical assistance to fulfil their obligations under the TFA.

1.43. The delegate of the United States appreciated the information shared by Grenada. She noted that Article 10.6.2 had been notified within category A she and encouraged them to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.44. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Guyana (G/TFA/N/GUY/1/Add.2).

1.45. The delegate of Guyana said that in the corresponding notification, 12 items had been stated in category C, with definitive implementation dates. However, funding had remained unavailable from counterparts. Guyana had been forced to fund many of those projects through government funding and loans, together with help from UNCTAD and the WCO. Guyana also wanted to thank

Korea Customs who had recently come forward with an offer to provide help. Guyana would approach other funding agencies for further help in this regard.

1.46. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Jamaica (G/TFA/N/JAM/1/Add.2).

1.47. The delegate of Jamaica said that the notification contained commitments in categories B and C. Eight items had been shifted from category C to category B, reflecting Jamaica's commitment to implementation of the TFA. Also, Articles 11.1-11.3 which had previously been notified in category B had been transferred to category A. Fifteen measures had been notified in category C, and the government was making strides in implementing some of them, together with the support of partners. However, funding gaps remained, and Jamaica was looking to receive additional backing in that regard. The delegate thanked UNCTAD for providing guidance on how to complete the category C commitments notification, which Jamaica had submitted on 21 August. She also thanked all other donors that had participated in Jamaica's implementation of the TFA, such as the World Bank Group and the ITC.

1.48. The delegate of the United States thanked Jamaica for their presentation and noted their ambitious and accelerated implementation plan, particularly the improvements in category designations. She noted that Jamaica had included Article 10.6.2 in category A and encouraged them to make the information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.49. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from Kazakhstan (G/TFA/N/KAZ/2/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/KAZ/2/Add.1/Corr.1). There were no comments from Members.

1.50. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from the Kyrgyz Republic (G/TFA/N/KGZ/2/Add.1).

1.51. The delegate of the Kyrgyz Republic said that the notification G/TFA/N/KGZ/2 contained details of Kyrgyz Republic's commitments under categories B and C., Following intensive internal work, the notification G/TFA/N/KGZ/2/Add.1, which contained the definitive dates of implementation under categories B and C, and the information with regards to transfers of categories B and C, had been distributed.

1.52. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from Lao People's Democratic Republic (G/TFA/N/LAO/1/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/LAO/1/Add.2). There were no comments from Members.

1.53. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Liberia (G/TFA/N/LBR/1).

1.54. The delegate of the United States thanked Liberia for the notification. she and noted that Articles 1.4 and 10.6.2 had been included in category A and she encouraged Liberia to make the information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.55. The delegate of Liberia thanked the United States for its comments and said that they would make all the detailed information available. He also thanked the WCO, which had been working closely with the Liberian Revenue Authority. He also thanked the World Bank for its support.

1.56. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Malawi (G/TFA/N/MWI/1) and Malaysia (G/TFA/N/MYS/1/Add.1).

1.57. The delegate of the United States said that this was the second time they were raising this issue with Malaysia. While the US appreciated the notification of definitive dates, Malaysia had placed Articles 1.4, 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 in category A and the US encouraged Malaysia to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.58. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Moldova (G/TFA/N/MDA/1/Add.2). There was no comment from Members.

1.59. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Montenegro (G/TFA/N/MNE/1/Add.1).

1.60. The delegate of Montenegro said that they would provide an update on implementation during their presentation later in the meeting.

1.61. The delegate of the United States thanked Montenegro for their upcoming presentation, as well as their notification. She commended them for their ambition on accelerating the implementation of eight provisions which were now in category A.

1.62. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Namibia (G/TFA/N/NAM/1).

1.63. The delegate of the United States thanked Namibia for the notification of its definitive dates. She noted that Articles 1.4 and 12.2.2 had been included in category A and encouraged Namibia to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.64. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Nigeria (G/TFA/N/NGA/1/Add.1).

1.65. The delegate of Nigeria said that the notification had been presented after a series of intensive stakeholder consultations. The notification demonstrated the importance Nigeria attached to the notification obligation. There had been a dedicated workshop on 13 and 14 February 2019 which culminated in the notification. This reflected Nigeria's high ambition and was also consistent with the ongoing trade facilitation reform agenda in the country. The delegate thanked development partners and donors, particularly the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the Commonwealth, the World Bank Group and the several stakeholders that had partnered with Nigeria in their TFA endeavours. Nigeria continued to count on their support and looked forward to the strengthening of the capacity of the National Trade Facilitation Committee.

1.66. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Pakistan (G/TFA/N/PAK/1/Add.2). There were no comments from Members.

1.67. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Papua New Guinea (G/TFA/N/PNG/1/Add.1).

1.68. The delegate of the United States thanked Papua New Guinea for the notification, as well as their ambition to accelerate implementation of Article 10.2 as a category A.

1.69. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Paraguay (G/TFA/N/PRY/1/Add.1).

1.70. The delegate of Paraguay stated that the latest notification complemented the notification presented in January 2018 and it included definitive dates for 11 provisions in category C, in compliance with Paraguay's commitments under the TFA. Paraguay understood the value of transparency and prompt communication through notifications. In this regard, they had made efforts for internal coordination through the National Trade Facilitation Committee to submit the definitive dates. There were pending notifications under Articles 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2, which Paraguay intended to present soon Paraguay was fully committed to the implementation of the TFA, which was particularly important to Paraguay as a land-locked developing country and which helped them continue with internal initiatives. She hoped that donor Members would take into consideration the information presented and that it would raise interest in the provision of technical assistance and capacity building.

1.71. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Saint Lucia (G/TFA/N/LCA/1/Add.1).

1.72. The delegate of the United States thanked Saint Lucia for the notification and noted that Article 12.2.2 had been included in category A. She encouraged Saint Lucia to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.73. The delegate of Saint Lucia thanked the United States and assured them that the corresponding notification would be made in due course. In light of the latest notification, Saint Lucia confirmed that it had satisfied its notification requirements under Articles 15 and 16 of the TFA. The delegate thanked UNCTAD for their assistance, particularly with regards to the needs' assessments and continuous support for implementation. The delegate also expressed gratitude to the World Bank and the Government of the United Kingdom. However, Saint Lucia had concern about the slow pace in which the requisite support had been forthcoming. The delegate reminded the donor community that their support was vital for the implementation of Saint Lucia's category C commitments.

1.74. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (G/TFA/N/VCT/1/Add.1).

1.75. The delegate of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines said that their category C commitments and definitive implementation dates were contained in the notification which was dated 7 August 2019. The government had contributed to the initiative to pre-empting some of the category C provisions. However, they had not been able to fully fund those projects. Therefore, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines looked forward to receiving technical and financial assistance to assist in the effective implementation of these provisions and thanked the contributors in advance. The delegate also thanked UNCTAD for their support in the training and empowerment program based on the needs-assessment, and for their support in the implementation of their own program. She also thanked the World Bank Group and the Government of the United Kingdom. However, she called on the donor community for their full support in the implementation of category C provisions.

1.76. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Samoa (G/TFA/N/WSM/1/Add.1).

1.77. The delegate of Samoa said that their notification contained the shifting of categories with extended definitive implementation dates, and a notification of definitive implementation dates of category C designations. Based on Articles 17 and 19 of the TFA, Samoa requested that Article 8 (Border Agency Cooperation) be shifted from category B to C with the extended definitive date. Further to an internal assessment and consultation with the implementing agencies, it had been recognized that Article 8 covered areas that would require capacity building and development of new processes and procedures to enhance the cooperation of border agencies. It had also been recognised that external support would be required to fully implement this provision. In the same document, Samoa had also notified its definitive dates for its category C commitments, in response to Article 16 of the Agreement.

1.78. The delegate of the United States thanked Samoa for their intervention and the notification. She noted, for the second time, that Articles 10.6.2 and 12.2.2. had been included in category A, and she encouraged Samoa to make the information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.79. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from the Seychelles (G/TFA/N/SYC/1/Add.2).

1.80. The delegate of the United States thanked the Seychelles for the notification. She noted, for the second time, that Articles 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 had been included in category A and she encouraged the Seychelles to make the information promptly available to the Secretariat.

1.81. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Sri Lanka (G/TFA/N/LKA/1/Add.1).

1.82. The representative of Sri Lanka stated that the notification contained definitive dates for category C commitments, in compliance with the deadline set forth for this purpose. The challenges faced by the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) had been significant in preparing the notification and deciding on the definitive dates of the category C commitments. When addressing the resources, both financial and human, required for fulfilling all the categories' commitments, it was evident that Sri Lanka lacked the resources required for implementation of these commitments, particularly category C commitments. Special consideration had to be made of recent manmade disasters, which brought far reaching implications on many economic activities including the tourism sector and financial markets. Those setbacks as well as the government's commitments to

compensate the victims and the properties affected by the series of blasts led to a diversion of financial resources for meeting those most needy requirements at the cost of implementing the projects targeted at category C commitments. There were also other challenges, such as bringing requisite amendments to the legal and structural frameworks of the institutions that were involved in the implementation of category C commitments. As a result, the NTFC had been compelled to decide on longer timeframes for category C commitments. As Sri Lanka attached significant importance to successfully discharging its obligations under the TFA, it needed assistance from donors and from developed countries to commit material in-kind and financial assistance for fulfilling the commitments. Sri Lanka was quite concerned that it had not been able to secure the required funds from donors and developed countries. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka acknowledged the support received so far in implementing 23 provisions under Category C, in particular, support from the EU under the Trade Related Assistance Program, and from the World Bank Group and the Australian Government. Sri Lanka would contact additional donors throughout the meeting, and hopefully would secure the required assistance.

1.83. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Suriname (G/TFA/N/SUR/1).

1.84. The delegate of Suriname said that they had notified their category C commitments, as well as the definitive dates and assistance and support for capacity building. Suriname had sent the proposal for ratification of the TFA to the council of ministers for its approval. It was already on the council's agenda, and with their approval, it could be sent for ratification by parliament.

1.85. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Tajikistan (G/TFA/N/TJK/1 and G/TFA/N/TJK/1/Corr.1).

1.86. The delegate of the United States thanked Tajikistan for its notification. Tajikistan had included Articles 10.6.2 as a category A and the United States encouraged Tajikistan to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.87. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Tonga (G/TFA/N/TON/1/Add.2).

1.88. The delegate of the United States thanked Tonga for its notification and noted that Article 10.6.2 had been included in category A. The United States encouraged Tonga to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly. The United States was also interested to receive updates on Tonga's timeframe for ratification of the TFA.

1.89. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Tunisia (G/TFA/N/TUN/1).

1.90. The delegate of the United States thanked Tunisia for their notification. She noted that Articles 1.4, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 had been notified as a category A and she encouraged Tunisia to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly. The United States would also be interested to receive any updates on the timeframes for ratification of the TFA.

1.91. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Ukraine (G/TFA/N/UKR/1/Add.2).

1.92. The delegate of Ukraine said that the notification included definitive dates for the eleven provisions included in category C, which should be implemented by December 2021, with one exception. The category C provisions included, *inter alia*, post-clearance audit, single window, transit, test procedure. The implementation process of some of those provisions had already started. The delegate noted that some provisions previously in category C had been shifted to category B, and they could be implemented without assistance and capacity building support. The shift had been possible as a result of fruitful engagement from several donors in recent years. Ukraine also expressed its appreciation for the assistance provided by the United States and the European Union.

1.93. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications from the United Arab Emirates (G/TFA/N/ARE/1 and G/TFA/N/ARE/1/Corr.1).

1.94. The delegate of the United States thanked the UAE for their notification. She noted that Articles 1.4, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 had been included in category A and she encouraged them to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.95. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notification from Zimbabwe (G/TFA/N/ZWE/1).

1.96. The delegate of the United States thanked the UAE for their notification. She noted that Articles 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 had been included in category A and she encouraged Zimbabwe to make the relevant information available to the Secretariat promptly.

1.97. The delegate of Zimbabwe thanked the United States for their intervention and indicated they would be supplying the required information.

1.98. The delegate of the European Union said that the European Union was pleased with the acceleration of notifications that had taken place since the last meeting of the Committee in June, both by developing countries and LDCs. They specially noted that LDCs had succeeded in determining their B and C categories, where there had been some lagging even in recent months. The EU also welcomed the constant updating of the Trade Facilitation Database, which allowed them to continuously monitor implementation and be updated almost daily. The delegate stressed that the Committee should not only comment on the notifications received between meetings but should also address the notifications that were missing in order to have an accurate view of implementation. In accordance with their calculations, twelve developing countries had failed to notify definitive dates for category B and C commitments. The EU called on developing countries and all countries that had missed the deadline to clarify if they would not be using the prerogatives contained in Section II of the TFA.

1.99. Regarding least-developed countries, the EU appreciated all efforts made to submit notifications, and in particular those Members that had succeeded in categorizing their commitments. There was concern that several LDCs did not have the capacity to categorize their commitments, which in turn meant that they would also have difficulty to reach out to donors and to detail their assistance needs. The EU urged Members that still lagged behind to voice their difficulties to find ways to address them. With regard to transparency notifications, the EU supported the interventions made by the US in respect of those provisions in category A for which Members had not yet provided the required information. According to the EU calculations, they amounted to between 60 and 80 Members.

1.100. The delegate of China noted that 180 Members had notified category A measures, 96 had notified category B measures and 86 had notified category C measures but there were still seven Members that had not made any notification. China called on the relevant Members to finish the categorization and submit notifications according to Articles 15 and 16 as soon as possible. China suggested that Members inform the Committee of the issues that prevented them from making their notifications in order for the committee to find solutions collectively.

1.101. The delegate of Japan welcomed all the notification made by Members, since they would be key to implementation and encouraged remaining Members to follow suit as soon as possible. Some developing countries and LDC Members had not provided the category notification set forth in Article 14. If the situation continued, Members' obligations under the TFA would become less apparent. The purpose of the notification under Article 16 of Section II of the TFA was to allow developing country and LDC Members to take additional time to prepare for the implementation of their obligations under Section I, as well as to secure the opportunities to obtain necessary technical assistance. When exercising these rights under Section II, Members should bear this purpose in mind and comply with the provisions stipulated in Section II. Japan regretted that some Members had failed to provide certain notifications within the relevant deadline and would like to know the reasons there of.

1.102. The delegate of Nigeria found it useful to engage in a detailed discussion on notifications. Earlier and shorter implementation dates for categories B and C were certainly beneficial. In addition, the notification exercise could also be enhanced by partnerships among stakeholders, capital and donors. It made sense for such groups to discuss and there was value in that commitment, which reflected their own experience. Also, their experience had led them to not limit or rely heavily on the donor or partner to do what the government thought they could do on their own. Shortly, they

would be requesting the approval for a certain percentage of reductions for customs to fund some of the projects where donor assistance was required. To an extent, this responded to their needs assessment and discovered that there are many things being done by Nigeria, that they could continue to implement and not necessarily have to wait for material resources from donors. Based on the previous interventions from Members, Nigeria sought clarification from the Secretariat in terms of the status of TFA implementation when the Agreement has not yet been ratified. Specifically, they wondered if the TFA would be binding on those Members who have not yet ratified the agreement.

1.103. The delegate of Chad indicated they had not ratified the Agreement and that their NTFC was not yet operational. However, different projects for notification had been sent out to the different services that were involved in the Committee meeting. Donor assistance would be welcome in order to establish the NTFC and to provide it with personnel.

Notifications under Articles 1:4, 10:4:3, 10:6:2 and 12:2:2 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

1.104. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the next group of notifications. They were often referred to as "transparency notifications" and consisted of notifications mandated by Articles 1:4, 10:4:3, 10:6:2 and 12:2:2 of the TFA. He recalled that all notifications had transparency objectives, either in a broader context—such as by calling for information on publication sources—or in relation to particular areas, such as the operation of a Member's single window, the use of customs brokers and customs cooperation. Since the last meeting, a total of seventeen notifications had been received from sixteen Members. Four of those notifications had been circulated after the airgram had been issued.

1.105. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notifications from Bangladesh (G/TFA/N/BGD/3), Brazil (G/TFA/N/BRA/2/Add.2), and the Dominican Republic (G/TFA/N/DOM/3).

1.106. The delegate of the United States thanked the Dominican Republic for their notification and enquired if it would be possible to provide additional URLs for the website in paragraph 2.1 of the TFA. Particularly, they were interested in the description of the practical steps needed for importing, exporting or transit.

1.107. The Chair proceeded to the notifications from Ecuador (G/TFA/N/ECU/2), Egypt (G/TFA/N/EGY/2), Grenada (G/TFA/N/GRD/2), and Indonesia (G/TFA/N/IDN/2).

1.108. The delegate of Indonesia acknowledged that transparency was important for traders as well as Members to gain the maximum benefits from TFA implementation. In this regard, Indonesia would continue its on-going efforts to improve transparency. Indonesia had notified the details of the Indonesia National Trade Repository (INTR), as well as the Indonesia National Single Window portal. The latter contained information on export/import requirements and procedures by HS code. Indonesia also provided 24-hour call centers in both Indonesian and English.

1.109. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notifications from Israel (G/TFA/N/ISR/1), Malawi (G/TFA/N/MWI/2), and the Maldives (G/TFA/N/MDV/1/Add.1 and G/TFA/N/MDV/1).

1.110. The delegate of the United States thanked the Maldives for their notification and congratulated them on their recent ratification of the TFA.

1.111. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notification from Mongolia (G/TFA/N/MNG/2).

1.112. The delegate of Mongolia indicated that they were preparing the pending notifications under Articles 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2.

1.113. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notification from Morocco (G/TFA/N/MAR/2).

1.114. The delegate of Morocco said that they had ratified the TFA on 14 May 2019. In addition, a technical meeting had taken place in recent days which brought together all the departments and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the TFA, to determine the final category B and C

dates and the needs of technical assistance. This information would be notified to the committee as soon as possible.

1.115. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notification from Nepal (G/TFA/N/NPL/2).

1.116. The delegate of Nepal said that they had notified the information on customs brokers related to Article 10.6.2 on 11 October 2019. Categories B and C had been notified in February 2018. Nepal was currently carrying out a series of trade facilitation initiatives, which included the establishment of the NTFC comprised of representatives from the public and private sectors. They were also in the process of sending a new customs law to the parliament, which included measures set out by the World Customs Organization. This bill had already been approved by the cabinet of ministers. The process to establish a single window had started, and Nepal had already launched the trade information portal. Communication had been established with donors concerning the implementation of category C commitments, which included the World Bank Group and others.

1.117. The Chair drew Members' attention to the notification from Peru (G/TFA/N/PER/3/Rev.1).

1.118. The delegate of Peru said that the notification detailed information on the website for the agencies which monitored the required materials in Article 1 of the TFA. The notification had been verified and validated by their NTFC. During the last two years, efforts had been made by the government to improve the regulation on external trade in line with the TFA. At all regulatory levels, Peru was in a process of reformulating the single window to broaden its scope of application. Peru reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Agreement and noted that to achieve this objective they required cooperation from donors for the compliance and improvement of measures.

1.119. The Chair proceeded to the notifications from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (G/TFA/N/VCT/3) and Viet Nam (G/TFA/N/VNM/2). In absence of further comments, the Chair opened the floor for any overall observations on this group of transparency notifications.

1.120. The delegate of the European Union said that the European Union was pleased with the growing number of Members that had complied with the notification obligation on transparency measures. This was crucial for the successful implementation of the TFA because the transparency measures contributed to helping small and medium enterprises to conduct their procedures within customs, accelerate their business and reduce the costs of trading. She noted that many countries that had committed to all the main Articles on transparency (1.4, 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2) had not notified at all, including significant economies. The United States had underlined many of those gaps in the preceding agenda items and identified the following Members in that situation: Malaysia, Albania, Brunei, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. She would appreciate it if Members' would indicate any mistakes in that list. Many developing countries and LDCs had committed to notifying their practices regarding Article 10.6.2 (customs brokers) at entry into force but had failed to do so. According to the EU, there were 39 Members in this situation. Regarding the notification of contacts for customs cooperation under Article 12.2.2, about 20 Members had not submitted their notification. This information was important as it enabled concrete customs cooperation on specific suspicious transactions.

1.121. The delegate of China said that they had submitted the notification under Articles 1.4 and 10.6.2. The notification on Article 10.4.3 had been submitted seven months ahead of schedule. Regarding Article 12.2.2, it was a category B measure and the notification would be made after implementation. China called on all Members to submit their outstanding notifications.

1.122. The delegate of Nigeria suggested to have a gentle reminder for countries that had outstanding notifications. At times, it could be a situation of oversight and it was important to subtly draw Members' attention to outstanding notifications and encourage them to present such notifications in a timely manner. If capacity building was required, Members should find a way to assist in that regard.

Notifications under Article 22 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

1.123. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the notifications under Article 22 of the TFA. There were two different kinds of notifications covered by this Article. The first consisted of input by donor Members on the assistance they provided (paragraphs 1 and 2). The second notification

required developing and least-developed Members to notify their contact points of the offices responsible for coordinating and prioritizing the assistance they wished to receive. Since the last meeting of the Committee, two delegations Norway (G/TFA/N/NOR/3) and Chinese Taipei (G/TFA/N/TPKM/2), had notified.

1.124. The delegate of Chinese Taipei explained that the notification contained three items. The first and second items concerned a TF workshop that had been held in Chinese Taipei, and which took place every year. The purpose of the workshop was mainly to provide capacity building for developing and least-developed countries. The third item referred to financial support to assist the Belize Government to improve its fiber connection to serve as a foundation for governments and businesses to better adopt ITC. It would contribute to the Belize Government's TF implementation. They provided similar assistance on a bilateral level, in particular with Palau in the Pacific Islands. Chinese Taipei had continuously improved their customs procedures to conduct customs reform in order to promote trade facilitation. The implemented measures included single window, authorized economic operators, advanced rulings applied to HS codes, rules of origin and customs valuation, post clearance audit as well as customs clearance procedures. The customs authority had gained momentum and looked forward to providing their support for the implementation of the TFA.

1.125. The delegate of Norway said that as a significant donor but a small country, they channeled their efforts through multilateral funds such as the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF, the Facility) and the World Bank Group's Trade Facilitation Program. While not mentioned in the notification, the delegate reported that Norway had been working with the WCO in the same manner they conducted their Aid for Trade efforts with multilateral funds.

1.126. The delegate of Nigeria thanked Chinese Taipei and Norway for the information and the update. Developing countries and LDCs benefitted from such transparency and took advantage of the facilities that had been reported. He encouraged others who were not yet on board to be forthcoming, as Nigeria attached importance to this particular aspect of transparency obligations.

1.127. The delegate of the United States thanked Chinese Taipei and Norway for their notifications and the corresponding introduction. She echoed the previous intervention from Nigeria and called on Members that were providing technical assistance and capacity building to fulfil their obligations under Article 22 of the TFA. In particular, the US called on China to submit their Article 22 notification outlining the support that it provides. China was a significant donor in the area of trade facilitation and provided technical assistance and capacity building projects to a number of recipient countries in the region, including a donation to the TFAF. Fulfilling the transparency obligations of the TFA applied to all WTO Members, as it provided a clear picture of all the work that was taking place globally. Therefore, they would appreciate it if China could notify the information to the Secretariat promptly. The US also encouraged any up to date notifications under Article 22 of the TFA, for any donations made to funds, specifically including the TFAF considering its close relationship to the Committee and the Secretariat. Management and transparency in those notifications was particularly important, as a joint obligation by Members.

1.128. The delegate of the European Union supported the statements from previous speakers and recalled that transparency was needed in technical assistance projects. It helped to improve coordination among donors which was necessary in order to avoid duplication and to ensure that existing gaps and needs were well identified and met.

1.129. The delegate of China thanked the United States for their comment regarding the notification under Article 22. China had donated USD 1 million to the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility and had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the WTO Secretariat which had been reported by WTO official press. China's donation would assist TFAF to fund the capacity building support needed by developing countries to implement the Agreement. TFAF would help countries in assessing their specific needs and identifying partners to fund capacity building activities. According to TFAF's operational guidelines, the Facility was operated, monitored and managed by the WTO Secretariat, in which China was never involved. It was China's understanding that their donation to TFAF had no transparency flaws. The rules of the TFA and its operational guidelines were silent on notification obligations of TFAF donors. Nevertheless, China attached great importance to the transparency obligations of WTO Members and was willing to demonstrate their strong commitments to the multilateral trading system and to help other developing and least-developed countries benefit through implementation of the TFA. China would finish their notification under Article 22.

1.130. The Chair referred to the notifications which had been received under Article 22.3. Twelve notifications had been presented by ten Members: Dominican Republic (G/TFA/N/DOM/2), Ecuador (G/TFA/N/ECU/3), Fiji (G/TFA/N/FJI/2), Grenada (G/TFA/N/GRD/3), Malawi (G/TFA/N/MWI/3), Maldives (G/TFA/N/MDV/2), Mauritius (G/TFA/N/MUS/3), Mongolia (G/TFA/N/MNG/3), Paraguay (G/TFA/N/PRY/2 and G/TFA/N/PRY/2/Rev.1) and Sri Lanka (G/TFA/N/LKA/2 and G/TFA/N/LKA/2/Corr.1).

1.131. The delegate of Jamaica took the floor on behalf of the ACP Group. She thanked the WTO Secretariat Trade Facilitation team for assisting many of their members to submit their notifications before the 22 August 2019 deadline. The ACP Group registered its appreciation to the TFAF team for organizing a special workshop for ACP non-LDC's in record time prior to the summer break. The team had also made themselves available for one-on-one consultations which took place throughout August and up to the time of the deadline. The workshop had been extremely helpful, especially where delegations were small and capital-based resources were meagre in order to meet the deadlines.

1.132. The delegate of the Dominican Republic joined in recognizing the work of the Secretariat. As a developing country, they had requested trade facilitation related assistance to help in the process of notifications, because they did not know how to fulfil many of the elements in the notifications. At that point, the Secretariat had carried out a technical assistance mission to the Dominican Republic where they provided hands-on support and help. It had been very meaningful and had allowed the Dominican Republic to submit all the required notifications within the pre-established deadlines. The delegate encouraged any other developing Members who might require this assistance to turn to the Secretariat and the TFAF.

1.133. The Chair informed Members that draft notifications had been received as follows: (i) ABC notifications from Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and Zambia; (ii) transparency notifications from Botswana, Colombia, and Paraguay; and (iii) an Article 22 notification from China.

1.134. The delegate of the United States indicated that they would review the incoming notifications and would come back to them at the next meeting.

1.135. The Committee took note of the notifications addressed under items A, B and C and of the information contained therein.

STATUS OF RATIFICATION AND NOTIFICATION PROCESS

Update by the WTO Secretariat

1.136. At the request of Members, the WTO Secretariat provided an update on the status of ratifications and notifications. It covered ratifications; implementation and transparency notifications; and information on technical assistance and capacity building that had been provided in those notifications.

1.137. In terms of ratifications, 146 instruments of acceptance had been received, with the latest two coming from Tajikistan and the Maldives, and seventeen ratifications to go. An overview of the area of implementation indicated that 118 notifications had been received for category A commitments, 96 for category B and 86 in category C. Since the last meeting, 56 notifications from 48 Members had been received by the Secretariat, as listed in the airgram, plus some additional notifications submitted since the circulation of the agenda.

1.138. The next upcoming deadline was 22 February 2020 milestone, when LDCs would have to submit their category B definitive dates for implementation. The next milestone would take place a year later, on 22 February 2021, when LDCs would provide their indicative dates for the implementation of category C commitments. Following, LDCs would present their definitive dates for implementation on 22 February 2022.

1.139. Currently, 60 developing Members had designated category C commitments and 55 of them (92%) had presented their definitive dates. Overall, 50% of commitments had been assigned under category A, 16% in B and 24% in C, with a 10% of commitments which have not yet been designated

under any category. The numbers had not changed substantially since the last meeting, but they provided a clearer picture as more notifications with definitive dates were being submitted.

1.140. Regarding requests for technical assistance and capacity building, 93% of developing country Members had submitted requests for all commitments designated under category C, 4% had presented some of their requests, while there was an outstanding 3% that had not submitted any requests. In the case of LDCs, 31% had presented complete details, 4% had notified some of their requests and 65% remained outstanding. It was important to note that as more notifications were received on this topic, the percentage of unidentified requests for technical assistance and capacity building (TACB) would reduce. The greatest number of requests for TACB had been received in the areas of human resources and training, assistance with legislative and regulatory frameworks and assistance with information and communication. No change had been recorded in terms of the measures with the highest and lowest rates of implementation.

1.141. The data on transparency notifications reflected that 82 submissions had been received under Article 1.2, 67 under Article 10.4.3, 85 for Article 10.6.2 and 76 concerning Article 12.2.2. The information also indicated that 16 notifications had been received under Article 22.1, 9 concerning Article 22.2 and 23 related to Article 22.3.

1.142. The delegate of Nigeria said that he would welcome information on an individual country basis Nigeria would like to assess to what extent had Aid for Trade supported implementation of the TFA.

1.143. The Chair indicated that such individual concerns relating to country experience could certainly be addressed bilaterally with the Secretariat.

1.144. The delegate of Hong Kong, China thanked the Secretariat for the presentation, as it was crucial for the Committee to keep track of the status of notifications and ratifications. Besides submission of notifications, implementation of the TFA on the ground was also important. One interesting and special feature of the Agreement was the direct benefits it could bring in terms of reduction in trade costs, and growth of international trade. As still stated in the WTO website, "estimates show[ed] that the full implementation of the TFA could reduce trade costs by an average of 14.3% and boost global trade by up to 1 trillion dollars per year, with the biggest gains in the poorest countries." This latest estimation was a study by WTO economists in 2015 and the delegate questioned if Members had achieved that goal. She assessed that a considerable gap remained and questioned if those figures were still valid as a long-term estimate.

1.145. The Agreement had entered into force more than two and a half years ago. With a substantive amount of notifications on hand, including more implementation dates of category B and C provisions, Members could be in a better position to see how the TFA was affecting the trade and economy. She suggested that the Secretariat start exploring with relevant divisions and economists, who might then engage with the private sector, and collaborate with other international bodies to conduct a study with updated information on the impact of TFA implementation on the trade and economy. The study could be a reality check to reaffirm Members were going in the right direction, and to provide an alert on areas which required more attention. The study itself was not a work of the TF Committee but could be one reference for the Committee to consider as follow-ups such as thematic discussions.

1.146. The delegate of Chad indicated they were unsure of their ability to comply with the 22 February 2020 deadline to provide the definitive dates for category B commitments, unless technical assistance was quickly forthcoming and allowed them to move forward.

1.147. H.E. the Minister of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan thanked Members for having elected Afghanistan as Chair of the Committee. He appreciated the vote of confidence, and he was pleased that his colleagues were doing their best to ensure that the Committee continued its successful journey in support of the effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Afghanistan had become a Member of the WTO on 29 July 2016. The negotiations to join the multilateral trading system had been highly demanding but Afghanistan had taken them as an opportunity. The process had resulted in the positive transformation of Afghanistan's economic, trade, legal and institutional landscape. Hence, like the accession process, the post accession era was equally important for the government to reap the benefits of their Membership of the

organization. As a result, exports were increasing, and Afghanistan was being integrated into the world economy. Amongst other steps they had taken to achieve this goal was the establishment of a permanent mission to the WTO in Geneva. The Minister was pleased to note that the mission was positively contributing to the work of the WTO at the hands of its Ambassador.

1.148. Afghanistan recognized the importance of creating a predictable stable cost-efficient business environment by adopting legislation and strengthening institutional capacity. Hence, they had ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. In Kabul they had also established an NTFC for coordination and follow-up of the WTO accession commitments. This committee had been meeting every few months and he was pleased to report that they were meeting several benchmarks every few months. These reforms constituted a larger reform agenda which had led to Afghanistan being the largest reformer according to the World Bank Group Doing Business Indicators Report last year. Coming from an LDC and a land-locked country, they knew all too well how important it was for traders and governments and consumers to have secure non-discriminatory access to markets and not to be held back by hampering red tape. It was therefore a pleasure that his colleagues had such a responsibility in Geneva and looked forward to working with everyone towards their important goals over the months to come.

1.149. H.E. the Minister of Economy of El Salvador was pleased to be back in Geneva, as she had been a delegate to this committee years before and reported she would be sharing on the progress made during the past four months of the new government under the appropriate agenda item.

Previously raised notifications – Statement by the United States

1.150. The delegate of the United States appreciated the great work that had been done in the Committee since June and congratulated the members of the Committee, the Chair, and the Secretariat for the success in implementing a major milestone of the Special and Differential Treatment provisions of the TFA, such as the 22 August deadline. The notifications due in that occasion were important because self-designation to implement the obligations in Section I of the TFA was hard fought during the negotiations. According to the numbers provided by the WTO Secretariat in their update and the US' own analysis, the vast majority of the developing Members met and exceeded the deadlines embedded in the TFA. This had been possible through the hard work of the Membership. There was now a clear picture of when developing Members, in addition to developed Members, would implement the obligations under Section I, and there were more details on the needs for technical assistance required by Members to meet their obligations.

1.151. In June 2019, just four months before the meeting, at least 51 of 89 of developing Members had not submitted the notifications due in August. That meant that over 57% of developing Members were in danger of losing the opportunities for the special and differential treatment flexibilities if the deadlines had been missed. The US had worked with many other Members to conduct an all-out effort to raise awareness among Members, as did the Secretariat and others, about the looming August deadline. The figures shared during the meeting were extraordinary—over 87% of developing Members had met the deadline and put in their definitive dates for the implementation of commitments in categories B and C. As self-declared timelines had been one of the experiments in trade facilitation, this was an enormous achievement for the Organization. Significant progress had been achieved over the previous four-month period to comply with the deadline, with only a handful of countries that remained outstanding. The US called upon them to come to the Committee and talk about why the dates had been missed, as other Members had before. However, it was time to cheer the success of all those Members that had come forward and made the dates. The Committee had certainly demonstrated leadership, persistence and determination to successfully pioneer a new kind of agreement dedicated to streamlining border procedures.

1.152. There was additional work to be done to implement the Agreement. The US had raised the issue of the overdue transparency notifications at previous committee meetings and at the current one. Some Members had self-identified Articles 1.4, 10.4.3, 10.6.2 and 12.2.2 as category A commitments, but were yet to provide that relevant information to the Secretariat. In the US' estimation, about 40% of the total Membership was overdue in submitting at least one of the transparency notifications. However, in the matter of the last 24 hours, that statistic had already changed, as many notifications were presently coming in. The US thanked delegations that had met with them over the last few weeks and that had communicated through email, as their commitment to the TFA was encouraging. They also thanked the Secretariat for their efforts to provide transparency and update the status of the notifications in the database.

1.153. The focus on transparency notifications was due to their importance for traders, as had also been noted by Hong Kong, China. Traders all started with finding information; from the single entrepreneur to the three-person business, to the 50,000-person company, businesses relied on information to enter new markets and to start trading. Information like documents; fees and charges and penalties and duties were critical and opened the path for new trade. The US placed a great importance on the timely implementation of those TFA provisions especially related to the transparency of information. The US was willing to assist any Member that was facing challenges in identifying the information needed to comply with the category A obligation that they had chosen. The delegate concluded by once again highlighting the over 90% success rate in the last few months.

1.154. The delegate of Nigeria recalled that trade facilitation was a unique topic and that the process of the agreement had been win-win. Now was not yet a time for celebration but of commendations. The delegate applauded the Secretariat and those Members that had made the achievement of the deadline possible. The WTO was known for missed deadlines; however, this had not been the case with trade facilitation which was a success story. Consequently, other areas could take the example of trade facilitation and the Committee in terms of moving forward. Nigeria was pleased to be a part of this story and would take a message of success back to capital.

1.155. The delegate of Norway supported the US statement. Although sometimes they disagreed, the delegate recognized the work that the United States had put in over the last months with regard to notifications. It was inspiring to see the US work enthusiastically for the WTO. None of the success could have been achieved without the US' support and Norway wished to express their gratitude for their efforts.

1.156. The Committee took note of the statements made.

B. EXPERIENCE SHARING/THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

1.157. This segment of the meeting was conducted in informal mode, with the understanding that information Members were willing to share would be made available on a dedicated website (https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tradfa_e/comm_tradfa_e.htm#oct19Meet) with related links also being included in the minutes of the meeting.

1.158. Members addressed the following issues:

Single Window (Article 10.4 of the TFA)

Presentation by China

1.159. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/6. China - Single Window in China - 201910.pptx>

Presentation by Chinese Taipei

1.160. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/Chinese_Taipei - CPT Single Window WCO CTF 1009final 1.pdf

Authorized Economic Operators (Article 7.7 of the TFA)

Presentation by the Republic of Korea

1.161. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/8. Republic of Korea - Korean AEO ProgramWTO TFA Final.pptx>

Publication and availability of information (Article 1 of the TFA)

Presentation by Jamaica

1.162. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://prezi.com/view/0zUO8o7tUKa2kIbY4xU/>

National Trade Facilitation Committees (Article 23.2 of the TFA)

Presentation by Norway

1.163. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/3. Norway - Norways National TF Committee.pptx>

Presentation by Montenegro

1.164. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/2. Montenegro - NTFC TF Committee meeting.pptx>

Presentation by El Salvador

1.165. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/1. Presentacion Avances Facilitacion de Comercio OMC rev Ministra.pptx>

Presentation by Paraguay

1.166. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/4. ppt CFC Octubre 2019 - CNFC Paraguay 9-10-19.pptx>

Assessing the Benefits of the Trade Facilitation Agreement for Agricultural Trade

Presentation by the United States

1.167. The delegate of the United States presented on a recent USAID report about the interrelationship between the Trade Facilitation Agreement and agricultural trade. There was a perception related to the TFA that its relevance to agricultural trade was minimal. In developing this report, USAID, in collaboration with its colleagues at the United States Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, had sought to dispel this sentiment.

1.168. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) had reported that global trade in food had tripled over the last decade and was expected to continue to grow. By 2050, the world's population was estimated to grow by more than 30 percent, with nearly all of the growth expected to be in developing countries. To feed this population and their increased demand for more and varied foods, and to assure food security, food production would need to increase by 70 percent. This increasing demand emphasized the need for safe and efficient trade of agricultural goods.

1.169. The WTO's 2015 World Trade Report had suggested that full implementation of the TFA would reduce the cost of trading agricultural goods by 10.4 percent. For perishable goods in particular, the cost reduction had been estimated to be even higher. Perishable goods had an *ad valorem* tariff equivalent of 43 percent in trade costs mostly derived from transportation costs and temperature controls maintained throughout the export and import process. By implementing the

TFA, the cost of trading perishables could be reduced by more than 18 percent given the sensitivity of perishable goods to timely release to avoid spoilage.

1.170. Studies highlighted in the World Trade Report had also showed that trade facilitation measures potentially had greater impact in developing countries that had a comparative advantage in agriculture and perishable goods. Implementation of the TFA could lead to an annual increase of 3.5 percent growth in exports for developing countries. For least-developed countries, the volume of traditional export products to existing markets could increase between 13 and 36 percent. These growth figures were of particular importance to small traders who depended on regional food trade, most of whom were women. The potential growth was also important for cross-border trade of food staples and food assistance.

1.171. The objective of the USAID's report was to provide government officials and other stakeholders with an overview of how the WTO's TFA could support agricultural trade. The report was organized into eight sections covering topics pertinent to the timely movement, release, and clearance of agricultural goods at borders, including goods in transit, by addressing common procedural challenges and ways in which the TFA can expedite agricultural trade. The sections of this report provided a summarized analysis of trade facilitation measures, including examples, with some sections delving into recommendations, resources, and best practices.

1.172. The report categorized TFA Articles' relevance to agricultural trade into three main groups: (i) those with a direct impact on the expedited clearance of agricultural trade and had measures that required implementation by the agriculture, health, or standard setting authorities (such as the measures on laboratory testing and perishable goods); (ii) those that had a general benefit to agricultural trade with regard to transparency and border management practices, but did not have expediting measures or did not have new implications for the agriculture, health, or standard setting authorities (such as Customs cooperation for verification purposes); and finally, those with minor impact on agricultural trade either because they did not contain any expediting measures or because they were not pertinent to agricultural trade.

1.173. Of the 36 provisions in the TFA, 30 fell under one of these three categories. TFA Articles that had similar commitments in the SPS and TBT Agreements (for example, publication of information, provisions on fees and charges, and appeal and review procedures) had been categorized as providing a general benefit given that the SPS and TBT Agreements provided similar and more specific obligations affecting agricultural trade. Section 2 of the report provided an analysis of SPS and TBT-related procedures that prevented or delayed agricultural exports. It included recommendations to facilitate agricultural trade by addressing procedural deficiencies through the implementation of the TFA.

1.174. Section 3 included a summary of developing countries' TFA commitments by category (A, B, and C) with a list of how developing countries had notified commitments under each agriculture-related Article. It included an analysis of the average cost and time for implementing the most notified Articles under category C. Section 4 provided a list of international and regional activities that focused on streamlining export certification and other SPS-related certifications for specific products. Section 5 discussed the TFA measures for handling perishable goods to keep the cold chain intact and avoid spoilage. It included a case study on how trade facilitation helped provide refrigerated warehousing in Tangier, Morocco. Section 6 was a summary of best practices in risk-based import inspections to prioritize shipments that need a physical inspection. Section 7 included a review of inspection and testing practices, and the rationale behind establishing risk-based import controls for SPS agencies. Section 8 included a discussion on the importance of the transit regime and corridors for trade and food aid. Section 9 included a summary of the challenges and recommendations for implementing e-certification and working towards a single-window platform.

1.175. The US hoped that Members would find this report of value and would catalyze additional support for implementation of the TFA given its broad and significant beneficial impact to agricultural trade.

1.176. The report could be found at the following link:

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TNBS.pdf

Implementation through public-private partnerships

Presentation by Brazil

1.177. Information on the presentation can be found under the following link:

<https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/5. Brazil - 191015 Global Alliance Inmetro.pptx>

1.178. The Committee took note of the statements made.

C. RECENT AND UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Update by the WTO Secretariat on activities of the TFAF

1.179. The representative of the WTO Secretariat explained that the Facility planned its activities based on requirements of the Agreement and the issues and priorities identified in the Committee, in Members' communications, and the needs expressed by developing and LDC Members. In the period since the last meeting, the focus had been on assisting developing Members to meet the 22 August 2019 notification deadline. Further information on the TFAF events was available at the TFAF website: <https://www.tfafacility.org/>.

1.180. The Facility had held a workshop for ACP group Members on the notification requirements on 22 July 2019. The TFAF had also prepared information sheets for each participating Member showing their current status and highlighting the notifications that were due. This had been followed by three half-day drop-in sessions in July and August that had allowed interested Members to have a one-on-one meeting to ask questions about their notifications. The sessions had reached 23 Members, including seven LDCs. Of the 16 developing country Members that had participated in these "deadline preparation" sessions, all had submitted their definitive dates for category C provisions.

1.181. The TFAF also provided assistance to many Members by phone, email and drop-in visits. These informal consultations had led to at least two additional Members submitting four notifications and at least one Member submitting their instrument of ratification. The Facility was confident of more positive outcomes from these interactions, but their informal nature made them harder to track.

1.182. Two national workshops had been conducted during the period being reported, one in the Dominican Republic and one in Barbados. Within two weeks of the workshop in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic submitted their category B and C definitive dates, transparency notifications for all four Articles and their donor contact point. The national workshop in Barbados had led to the notification of category C definitive dates and TACB needs by the August deadline. This workshop had been conducted by a consultant who specialized in committees and he had also assisted the National Committee to draft terms of reference and develop an action plan.

1.183. Within 10 weeks of the TFAF workshop for the LDC group retreat held in Switzerland, three participating LDC Members submitted five notifications. Since the last committee meeting in June, the Facility had supported 21 developing and LDC Members to submit 33 notifications and 1 instrument of ratification. Therefore, it was possible identify a direct positive contribution from TFAF on well over a third of the 86 notifications received from developing and LDC Members in the crucial reporting period.

1.184. The Facility had also reached out to partner agencies to assist Members to meet the August deadline. The Annex D organizations and regional programs such as TradeMark East Africa and CARICOM had reported back on efforts that they had taken to help reach this goal. All WTO TF workshops had a component on the notifications and would continue as such for as long as necessary.

1.185. The current Committee meeting had also benefited from the participation of 58 capital-based officials and representatives from CARICOM, EAC, ECOWAS, SADC, and UEMOA, funded by the TFAF. As always, to benefit from the opportunity, and to ensure value for money, they were in Geneva all

week and would attend additional sessions organised by the Facility as well as donors and partner organizations. Although none of these sessions were restricted, it had not been possible to advertise them widely because of severe meeting room constraints. The day before, the Facility had organized a session on notifications, and on TFA legislation and policy considerations which had included a presentation on implementing the TFA and keeping SMEs in mind.

1.186. Now that most Members had notified their TACB needs, the TFAF was enhancing efforts to assist Members to find implementation support. At the suggestion of a donor Member, the Facility had conducted a working group exercise allowing participants to share their experiences of identifying donors and preparing them to participate in the next day's dedicated session. The working groups had been facilitated by donors, partners and WTO colleagues. The day had concluded with presentations from several donors and regional organizations on their implementation support programs. This had been followed by a reception that provided an informal setting for direct bilateral discussions between developing countries and donors. For Members to reap full benefits from these sessions, participants had been asked to identify in advance the provisions for which they already had donors and the provisions for which they needed support. The TFAF had also prepared a workbook with details on TF assistance programs based on information provided by donors.

1.187. For any Member still unable to identify assistance following these discussions, there were one-on-one lunchtime sessions scheduled this week to assist with the completion of expressions of interest for TFAF Grants. The TFAF had already assisted with 5 expressions of interest. These would be circulated to donors early next week. Last week, an expression of interest had been circulated to the donor list and had received an immediate response from the World Bank Group offering implementation support. Hopefully such success would be replicated with any requests we receive this week. A number of partners had benefitted from the TFAF's offer to organize sessions the current week to benefit from the capital-based experts' attendance.

1.188. During the upcoming days, UNOHRLLS and UNCTAD would conduct an Experts Group Meeting on Improving transit cooperation and trade facilitation for further integration of landlocked LDCs in global trade. The Facility had organized parallel sessions for Pacific and Caribbean island countries to explore common issues. The UK would hold a session on monitoring and evaluation of the TFA and the EU would host a session for LDC Members on the rules of origin registered exporter system-or REX for LDCs. On the day of the committee meeting, WTO officials from the development division held a session on TFA implementation and disaster response. A program outlining all of these sessions was available on the Facility website, which had not been widely advertised due to the limited capacity of available rooms.

1.189. One of the roles of the Facility was to enhance coordination and cooperation of partner organizations and to discourage duplication. For this reason, they frequently participated in events organized with or by partners. In July there has been a co-organized event at the WTO for 45 participants from 16 countries, a peer-to-peer event. The World Bank Group had funded the participants and had made their stay long enough to attend the Aid-for-Trade week. Also, in conjunction with the World Bank Group, the TFAF had taken advantage of the Aid-for-Trade week to reach a broader audience by organizing the Facilitation Feud game show. This had been based on a popular TV game show and had involved conducting a survey in advance. Two teams of TF experts from partner organizations, national administrations, private sector and Geneva delegates had tried to guess the top answers to the TF survey questions to win points. DHL had made a special delivery of the prizes and explained how TF provisions helped them provide speedy delivery. Members of the audience also had gotten a chance to play along. As always, information had been distributed during Aid-for-Trade and at last week's Public Forum. A big draw to the TFAF table had been the World Bank Group's virtual reality tours of the border between Guatemala and Honduras and the Port of Freetown in Sierra Leone.

1.190. Last month, the Facility had funded the participation of 6 Pacific Island officials in a 2-day Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum, organized by UNESCAP in New Delhi, India. Also last month, the WTO had presented at an African Alliance Single Window Conference in Cameroon. During the current month, the WTO would present at an Asia Europe Meeting on Single Window Cooperation in China. The biggest upcoming event was a border agency cooperation workshop for Latin American countries, organized with the assistance of ALADI. The program would be the same as the event conducted earlier this year in the Caribbean with CARICOM and would again be conducted with the cooperation of many international and regional partner organizations.

1.191. In closing, the representative stated the Facility was developing their work plan for 2020. If there were any suggestions, they would be appreciated as soon as possible in order to meet the end of November deadline. As always, close attention was being paid to the priorities and issues relating to technical assistance identified in the Committee and especially in the dedicated session and would reflect those discussions in future work.

1.192. The delegate of Barbados thanked the Secretariat for their presentation and more emphatically for the capacity building exercise that had taken place in Barbados. The outcome of this workshop had been the presentation of their category C notification, which had been introduced in the corresponding item of the agenda. They would look forward to more updates and reports from the Secretariat concerning their trade facilitation activities, in particular technical assistance and capacity building.

Update by UNCTAD on a Compendium of Good Practices in Implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement Experiences from developing and least-developed countries

1.193. The Chair said that at the request of Rwanda, UNCTAD would update the Committee on its Compendium of Good Practices in relation to implementing the TFA.

1.194. Together with the Commissioner of Customs from the Rwanda Revenue Authorities, UNCTAD introduced the Compendium of Good Practices in implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. The focus was on a number of case studies and experiences from developing and least-developed countries. While there were several positive experiences and case-studies from the developed world, there were many others taking place in developing and least-developed countries that would be valuable for TFA implementation. The report was also in line with the sustainable development goals, paragraph 17.9, on enhancing South-South Cooperation.

1.195. The goal had been to share experiences between countries for each of the TFA measures and probably additional examples would be added over time. This was also an encouragement for countries to approach UNCTAD if they considered they had a good case to share. UNCTAD would be very glad to add it to the compendium. The report would be published both online and in hard copy, based on a standard structure. The document began with an overview of implementation, and counterclockwise, there would be an insight into the detailed services that were provided for a specific measure. The report also touched upon subjects like funding, required legislative changes, capacity building efforts and technical assistance that had been provided, obstacles in implementation, lessons learned, success factors and benefits achieved by the country. Finally, it also addressed costs, fees, and sustainability for each case. This methodology would be followed for each case study.

1.196. The first volume of the compendium would include seven case studies: Kenya Trade Portals with response to Article 1.1 and 1.2 of the Agreement; Kazakhstan on Pre-arrival processing; Sri Lanka on electronic payment; Colombia on risk management; Azerbaijan on border agency cooperation; Rwanda single window; and Paraguay on the establishment of the National Trade Facilitation Committee. This information would be available on the UNCTAD website in the coming weeks, along with additional technical notes for each of the TFA obligations. The report had also been developed with partner organizations such as ITC and UNECE, as well as the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation.

1.197. The cases were first presented with a page that introduced the corresponding measures or obligations, a summarized infographic to later delve into the details. Contact points were also provided, in case anyone wished to reach out to the participating countries. The compendium would likely not be printed out for environmental concerns, but it would be available on the website.

1.198. The Commissioner of Rwanda thanked UNCTAD for selecting their case study on single window for the compendium. The single window had been one of the key reforms in trade facilitation and had made a substantial difference in how Rwanda conducted business. Implementation of the single window had started in 2012. TMEA had been an initial donor with UNCTAD as the system provider. Currently, there were 34 agencies connected to the system, which included an association of clearing agencies that had almost 200 members. That added to 234 members connected and using the system. The system worked 24 hours, and it was used even by revenue authorities in the

East African community, given their single customs territory. As a result, they could reduce the processing time of goods destined to Rwanda.

1.199. Those 234 agencies comprised all regulatory agencies, the Rwanda Revenue Authority; the Customs Department; the Bureau Standards; all ministries; all agriculture boards directly involved in the clearance of goods. It also included revenue authorities of other partner states, as had been previously mentioned. The system was also being used by business entities, banks, shipping lines, insurance, port authorities; basically, every agency involved in the clearance of goods.

1.200. The system offered the processing of custom declarations, which was the primary function of the electronic single window. It also facilitated the issuance of licenses and permits, as well as other certificates. This was unlike in the past where a clearing agent had to move across different offices to get a license –for example, an import license, or to get a certificate of origin. With the Rwanda electronic single window, this was possible through the system. Electronic payment was also provided for, with all banks connected to the system. Risk management had also been integrated, which was among the regulatory agencies, to harmonize risk management for the clearance of goods. Essentially, the whole clearance process was done through with the single window.

1.201. There were significant benefits. In terms of time, it had been possible to reduce the export clearance time from 67 hours to 34 hours –this had a big impact on the Doing Business Index of the World Bank. There had also been a reduction in the time for clearance of imports by 86%. It used to take 11 days, including the time for collecting all the documents for making a declaration. The use of the electronic single window to get applications and certificates had significantly reduced the time for processing the documents. According to an independent study that had been conducted in 2017, the business community had saved USD 6 million on transport, and it had saved USD 1 million on transaction costs because there was no need for chasing documents, going to different agencies, and this had also had a big impact on the transaction costs. Given that everyone could get the documents at the same time, some of the processes were done simultaneously, unlike before where perhaps customs had to wait for bureau standards to process a document. With the single window, because a trader or clearing agent could submit all of the documents within an entry point, and the information was shared with all key players, it was possible to start processing the declaration without waiting for other agencies.

1.202. Some of the costs and fees collected were able to ensure the sustainability of the system. The total costs of the system had been reasonable at USD 4 million. When looking at the advantages, the investment outweighed the costs of the investment. Rwanda charged USD 3.5 for the use of the system. This was not a charge introduced with the single window, but it was a pre-existing fee for computer processing. It was decided to keep the fee to sustain the system. In the case of a simplified declaration, especially for SMEs, the cost was USD 0.5 for one declaration.

1.203. The delegate of Nigeria thanked UNCTAD and Rwanda for the presentation and the experience sharing. He enquired from UNCTAD about the eligibility criteria for a country to be able to be part of these success stories. He also questioned, in the case of the trade information portal, why Nigeria had started in the same page as Kenya but had unfortunately fallen behind, and why Nigeria was no longer a priority.

1.204. The delegate of the Dominican Republic thanked the presenters and posed the following questions: (i) how did Rwanda plan to sustain the system over time; (ii) who was the owner of the source that had been used to design the system; (iii) would they make any changes to it if they could and how much would that cost; (iv) if Rwanda could have their own program, for example, and if there would be any maintenance costs over time; (v) who was the owner of the licenses and who had paid for them.

1.205. The representative of UNCTAD clarified that any country was eligible to take part in the compendium anyone who considered they had a good case should approach UNCTAD. It was important that the cases would be of interest to the wider community and that they were functioning in an appropriate way. In the case of the trade portal of Nigeria, UNCTAD had started the project early on with Kenya and had developed it into further detail, even into a regional trade portal.

1.206. The Commissioner from Rwanda explained that the government was responsible for the sustainability of the single window system, starting with the fees collected through declarations, but the system was also a part of the budget. The owner of the license was UNCTAD, but they shared the source, including with local experts. Any time there was a problem with the system, there was no need to bring in an expert from overseas, but rather there were local experts who could provide assistance.

1.207. The presentation could be found at the following link:

https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/UNCTAD_20191015_Rwanda_UNCTAD_presentation_compendium_good_practices.pptx

Update on activities of the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation

1.208. The representative from the Global Alliance recalled the presentations and statements that had been made earlier in the meeting with respect to partnerships with the Global Alliance. The secretariat of the Alliance was composed of three organizations – ICC, WEF and CIPE, and was supported by six donors - United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and Denmark. The initiative had been launched at the end of 2015, with a mission to help developing and least-developed countries to implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement, and they did so by bringing the public and private sectors together as equal partners.

1.209. Their work with the private sector was their distinguishing characteristic, as they brought them to the table as a constructive partner. Trade facilitation reforms were a shared responsibility, and the Alliance facilitated the coming together of the private sector government. Currently, there were nine projects in place in nine countries spread across the world. They would soon be closing their first project, which had taken place in Colombia with INVIMA. While they were excited to share the results, they were still working on the numbers. What they showed so far was a demonstrable reduction in the time and cost of trading. In addition to working in Brazil and Colombia, there were projects in place in Morocco, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and Africa—Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia. They were also currently scoping in Tunisia, India, Nigeria and Costa Rica. They might potentially have the first regional project for AEOs. They were also looking at the South-Pacific countries of Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Senegal.

1.210. During the 18-month period from January 2018 through 30 June 2019, they had engaged over 400 businesses, including multinationals, SMEs and associations. They had worked with local business in countries where projects were being developed, while multinationals brought in their resources and knowledge to contribute to the project. One example was DHL developing an eLearning module for internal use by Zambia, at no cost. MAERSK had also contributed with a methodology to calculate direct and indirect costs of trade. Such methodology would be published shortly.

1.211. The Alliance kept a figure of "in-kind" contributions because their promise was that for every dollar from the donors, the private sector would contribute with resources, knowledge and expertise. In the future, they were looking at ways to deepen their engagement with the private sector and bring more of them to the table. One of their successes was hackathons, which were not commonly associated with trade facilitation, but they were new ways of finding solutions. More about this would be made public in 2020.

1.212. The Alliance was also looking at deepening their work with SMEs and gender sensitizing their projects. Also, they were exploring the data in these areas to measure their impact.

1.213. The presentation can be found at the following link:

https://www.tfadatabase.org/uploads/thematicdiscussiondocument/Global_Alliance_-_19.10.15_WTO_TF_Committee_-_presentation.pptx

1.214. The delegate of Nigeria acknowledged that the Alliance was conducting scoping missions in Nigeria, where he had participated in a meeting concerning such discussions. It had been expressed at that meeting that there was a need to fast track the pace of activities, in particular for project preparation. It had also emphasized that there was a need to have a time frame for the project and

its development. For this reason, they were encouraging and appealing to have a project plan for next year, where implementation would be key. The delegate also appreciated the engagement of the private sector in this regard.

Update on the Trade Facilitation Indicators by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

1.215. The representative of the OECD indicated they had collected information on trade facilitation measures and reforms across the WTO Membership every two years, and they had recently collected the data for 2019. At the last Committee meeting, they had sent out the data for each country to the relevant delegations in Geneva, inviting them to check that there were no mistakes and gaps, and suggesting that delegations contact the OECD back with corrections or additions by the end of the summer. Earlier in the meeting, some delegations noted that they had not been able to do so. Therefore, she proposed an additional amount of time for any further corrections to be received by 10 November, so that Members would be able to take it into account as the OECD pulled together their data.

1.216. The OECD had collected the data, along with the corrections and replies that had been received. While not currently in a position to provide details, if the Committee was interested, the OECD could provide further information during the next meeting. Preliminarily, they had seen that progress made in the 2017-2019 period had been slower than in the 2015-2017 period. The assumption was that perhaps Members had been focusing on notifications. Another highlight from the data collected thus far was that the kind of progress that had taken place could be broken down into three areas. There had been little progress in Articles 1-6, but it was reminded that this was an area where there had been significant advances in the past. On the contrary, more activity had been recorded in Articles 7-10. It was noted that the most important challenge in terms of trade facilitation reforms in 2017 had been Article 8 (Border Agency Cooperation). That had remained equal for this period, and while progress had been recorded, it had not been as fast or as significant as with Articles 7 and 10. The representative concluded by making herself available for further questions on the dataset, the progress or fact checking.

1.217. The delegate of the European Union stated that while not directly related, they had taken part in the work of the OECD through funding. She called on the various entities and international organizations that carried out studies on the implementation of the TFA. Hong Kong, China had previously proposed a study of the current status of implementation of the Agreement. There was a large majority of countries for which the final date of implementation of category B had reached, and it would be interesting to see the latest status report. The EU had received questionnaires from the regional Europe commission of the United Nations. The delegate was not aware if the UN had sent questionnaires to all their regional entities on the implementation of the Agreement, but the EU encouraged entities that prepared questionnaires and were involved in the global study on the implementation of the Agreement to engage in coordination efforts. There should also be a database so that countries would not have to repeatedly fill out the questionnaires. This was very demanding work and it gave the strong impression of lack of coordination, even though that remained as an ultimate ideal. In so far as possible, there should be coordination and ensure synergy between the various entities involved in the studies on implementation.

1.218. The representative of Nigeria thanked the OECD and clarified that Nigeria had not been able to validate the process for 2012 and not 2019, for reasons that had been bilaterally discussed with the OECD. Most of the indicators used by the OECD related strongly to customs, and they were the authority that should have been asked to make the validation, this was the issue they had faced at that time. this was a very useful tool, particularly in benchmarking and improving border procedures.

1.219. The delegate agreed with the significant challenge identified with the OECD in the implementation of Article 8 (Border Agency Cooperation). They would be interested in learning how to overcome this specific challenge. He believed it was not difficult, but only a matter of cooperation, and how to ensure it was achieved in a manner to attain this goal. If there were no best practices that the OECD could share, then the exercise would be useless. The delegate stated that, as they were not part of the OECD, they were not a part of this assessment process and wondered about the feedback in Africa and other developing countries. The conclusions reached seemed to create the impression that almost every country was doing well, but that was not necessarily the case.

1.220. The representative of the OECD clarified that she would be able to provide more details on the study, if the Committee was interested, as their participation was determined by Members. The OECD would be presenting that information to their working party on trade in December and by then, that information would be available. With respect to the cooperation with border agencies, there was nothing more beneficial than what was taking place in the Committee, where countries exchanged their experiences, shared their best practices and the challenges faced.

1.221. The delegate of the United States thanked the OECD for their work and appreciated the update on the trade facilitation indicators.

1.222. The Committee took note of the statements made.

D. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT (2019) OF THE TRADE FACILITATION COMMITTEE TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS

1.223. According to the Procedures for an annual overview of WTO Activities and for reporting under the WTO (WT/L/105), which had been adopted by the General Council on 15 November 1995, all bodies constituted under Agreements in Annex 1A of the WTO Agreement were required to submit an annual factual report to the Council for Trade in Goods, which was then to take note of these reports. In line with this requirement, a draft report of the Trade Facilitation Committee had been circulated in document G/TFA/W/17.

1.224. The Chair informed there was a correction to be made in paragraph 5 of the Draft Report. In the second line from the bottom, the word "developing" should be inserted before "Members".

1.225. The delegate of Hong Kong, China indicated that in paragraph 10 concerning the rules of procedure, the language seemed to indicate that work had not been concluded and that the rules of procedure had not been completely approved. Assuming the rules of procedure would be approved at the upcoming CTG meeting in November, he suggested to include a footnote stating that the CTG had approved them in 2019.

1.226. The Chair enquired of Members if would be ready to adopt the report with the suggested amendments.

1.227. It was so agreed.

E. OTHER BUSINESS

1.228. The Chair informed the Committee that Uruguay would make its proposed intervention under Other Business during the Dedicated Session on Assistance and Capacity Building.

1.229. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the subject of the dates for the Committee meetings of 2020. He proposed to schedule regular meetings of the Committee on 11 and 12 February; 19 May and 20 May and 20 and 21 October. The dedicated session on technical assistance would take place on 23 October, back to back with the regular session.

1.230. The delegate of Nigeria had no objections to the dates but hoped that conflict with other meetings at the WTO would not take place, especially when considering small delegations.

1.231. The Chair confirmed that efforts would be made to ensure this did not happen in the future and further clarified that these were still provisional dates that could be adjusted.

1.232. The delegate of Canada appreciated the forward planning, as it was helpful to have a year's worth of provisional dates for meetings. He encouraged the Chair and the Secretariat to circulate those dates to other Committees so coordination could take place in the sense of avoiding conflict and also opening the possibility for capital-based officials to come to Geneva and attend several meetings.

1.233. The Chair asked Members if it was agreeable to them to invite representatives of the Annex D organizations to participate in the next Committee session, together with a representative from the Global Alliance.

1.234. It was so agreed.

1.235. The Committee took note of the information and of the statements made.

1.236. The meeting was adjourned.

2 DEDICATED SESSION ON ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

2.1. The Chair recalled that in accordance with Article 21.4 of the TFA, the Committee should hold at least one dedicated session per year. The agenda items for the dedicated session were also listed under Article 21.4, and they included (i) exchanges on any implementation problems; (ii) review of progress in the provision of assistance and support for capacity building to support the implementation of the TFA; (iii) the sharing of experiences and information on ongoing assistance and support for capacity building and implementation programs, including challenges and successes; (iv) review of donor notifications as set forth in Article 22 and (v) review of the operation of Article 21.2 (assistance and support for LDCs).

2.2. Considering the cross-cutting elements and to facilitate a free-flowing discussion, the Chair proposed to take the first three items under this session as a group.

2.3. It was so agreed.

I. EXCHANGES ON ANY IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS; REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TFA; AND, THE SHARING OF EXPERIENCES AND INFORMATION ON ONGOING ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS, INCLUDING CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

2.4. The delegate of Guatemala thanked the Secretariat for this meeting, as it was important for developing countries. Guatemala had already submitted the categorization of commitments (G/TFA/N/GTE/1/Add.1) and had also notified the definitive dates for those commitments (G/TFA/N/GTE/2). They had received cooperation from the European Union through a support program designed to improve competitiveness and capacity for SMEs and MSMEs. This had allowed them to implement Articles 1.2.1(b), 1.3.1, 7.6.3(a), 7.7.3(d)-(g). WCO had also assisted to carry out a study which identified the methodology and responsibilities for the calculation of the average release times based on international best practices. Thanks to that study, Guatemala had been able to comply with Article 7.6.1 of the TFA.

2.5. There had been challenges, which motivated the extension of implementation dates to 2020 in their latest notification. In addition, they had not received technical assistance and capacity building offers for some of their provisions designated under category C. It may be the case that further extensions might therefore be required. An example was Article 1.1(f), where they had requested support for software and computer hardware to implement an information software for some of the governmental institutions that took part in that exercise. Thus far, they had not received any pledges for assistance. In the case of Article 1.2.1(a), they were waiting for a consultancy regarding the development of the various obligations that were necessary for online forms. Articles 7.8.2(c) and 7.8.2(d) called for technical assistance to acquire experience from countries that had already implemented these measures. In addition to this, they had not received offers for the drafting of standards. They hoped to hear from other Members who had already implemented systems on express shipments.

2.6. Guatemala had category C commitments with looming deadlines. They would not be able to comply with these dates as they had not received offers for technical assistance. It was important that the Committee discussed how these cases could be dealt with to devise a better way of submitting their requirements. For this meeting, Guatemala had prepared a chart with information on cooperation for obligations under category C that had to be complied with within 1 February 2020 and 1 July 2024. This information was available to anyone who was interested.

2.7. The delegate of Mauritius informed they had been engaged in developing trade facilitation measures in line with the strategy to become a hub for the region. Mauritius had been able to commit itself to eliminating obstacles to trade and investment. Several trade facilitation measures were also

being implemented such as the trade portal, paperless customs and online tracking systems, amongst other measures that have contributed to competitiveness. Mauritius had been one of the first countries to have ratified the TFA and notified commitments in July 2014. I had also recently notified its definitive dates for implementation of its category B as well as C measures. Up to now, Mauritius had obtained assistance from WCO for the publication of average release times and informed they were fully compliant with this provision. The WCO had in addition provided technical assistance to conduct scoping studies for the setting up of a customs laboratory. The World Bank had also assisted in the enhancement of the single window and the delegate thanked the WCO and the World Bank for their support. Donors had pledged assistance to WTO Members in implementing commitments under the TFA. Despite having sent communications to all of the donor focal points, Mauritius had not been able to secure assistance in addition to that mentioned earlier. They needed both technical and financial assistance to implement measures in category C. In the absence of such assistance, they would not be able to implement their category C measures within the notified deadline. They called on the Committee and pleaded on behalf of concerned Members for donors to come forward and extend the required assistance.

Presentation by CARICOM

2.8. The delegate of CARICOM thanked the WTO Secretariat for inviting the Caribbean Community Secretariat to participate in this dedicated session on technical assistance to share their experience and the initiatives that were currently underway in the Caribbean Community to support TFA implementation. CARICOM was composed by 13 WTO Members and one country currently negotiating accession to the WTO, which would be the Bahamas. They were 12 developing island and continentally economies and one LDC-Haiti, with 11 members having ratified the Agreement. Several member States, as heard from Jamaica the previous day, were mainstreaming TFA implementation into their national development plans and strategic plans. They were taking very active steps to implement the agreement. All CARICOM developing country Members had completed their implementation notification including definitive dates for category C, and the related TACB support needs.

2.9. The delegate was struck during the formal session, where several delegations commended the tremendous success of this committee in relation to the number of notifications that had been received. For CARICOM, the notifications required tremendous effort to meet the deadline, given the fact that many countries had not yet made a lot of progress in engaging donors. Several of the Members who took the floor the day before had expressed concern about the state of play of engaging donors. The fact that they had met the deadline should be taken as a clear signal of their commitment to implementing the obligations of the Agreement.

2.10. The next phase of implementation the TFA was crucial for CARICOM, as it was for developing and least-developed countries. This would test the efficacy of the TFA, in particular Section II of the Agreement which Members had negotiated in good faith. Therefore, the real success of the Committee and of the TFA would be measured not by the extent of notification but by the extent of the success in securing assistance to build implementation capacity. They would look forward to sincere engagement with donors, and donor organizations to realize the benefits of the TFA for small economies.

2.11. CARICOM applauded the efforts of the TFAF in organizing the contact with donor organizations and Members this week. They welcomed the lunchtime sessions for completion of the expressions of interest for grants under the TFAF. As CARICOM, they were encouraging all Members to make those initial expressions of interest.

2.12. The community was adopting a coordinated regional approach to implement 18 measures of the TFA, which were commonly notified as category C. This was in line with Article 24.5 of the TFA. They were leveraging aid to support and catalyze regional integration, in the context of their single market and economy, through the adoption of coordinated and harmonized trade facilitation reforms across member States. In 2019, they had launched a regional CARICOM committee on trade facilitation which would oversee regional coordination. This had been done with support from UNCTAD and the WTO TFAF. CARICOM had approved a regional strategy in 2017, developed with support from the World Bank and it contained project outlines for ten priority regional initiatives which would oversee implementation of five of these priority measures. Those priority areas were transparency; test procedures; single window; risk management; and post clearance audit. CARICOM ministers had agreed that the strategy would be the main tool for coordinating the

mobilization of donor resources to support regional implementation including support for national implementation. This was for both public and private sector. It was intended to be complimentary to national mobilization efforts.

2.13. They had been using the strategy to successfully engage donors. The strategy had created a common framework on which to design and deliver regional capacity building initiatives and interventions for both public and private sector stakeholders. They had successfully used this strategy to design capacity building initiatives in collaboration with the TFAF, the Islamic Development Bank and coming up soon with the World Customs Organization. The strategy had also been a good tool for engaging donors and donor coordination. It sent the political signal to donors about political buy-in by member States governments to TF implementation.

2.14. CARICOM had organized one donor dialogue to date, with development partners, both regional and international in St. Lucia. There was an agreement to have yearly donor coordination meetings. The strategy also allowed, thorough regional coordination, to rationalize the use of scarce donor resources, through regional interventions to address common TACB needs. Most member States needed to undertake legislative reform, as well as undertake training to build capacity related to risk management and other areas. They had also been able to rationalize the use of donor intervention and donor resources through these regional approaches.

2.15. Also, along these lines, they had been able to harness regional expertise to deliver TACB support. It substantially reduced reliance on international support and built capacity within the region to share national experiences so that countries that were higher up the implementation curve could share with countries that were now beginning to implement some of the measures. Going forward, that would hopefully promote some public-private partnerships to design and develop regional projects.

2.16. They had been doing this successfully for now, with the Secretariat to engage some donor organizations. Success had been moderate for mobilizing support for ratification, notification, to strengthen up NTFC's and for regional capacity building workshops. They appreciated their work with the WCO, with whom they had a memorandum of understanding. The World Bank Group had been a source of constant partnership, both at the national and regional level. The CARICOM Secretary General had indicated to the World Bank Group that all members States had an interest in accessing the funds available under the Trade Facilitation Support Program (TFSP). They had developed a very good and lasting partnership with UNCTAD, through the negotiation and now through implementation. With support from the United Kingdom, UNCTAD was assisting eight of Members to build capacity in the context of the national trade facilitation committees.

2.17. CARICOM had developed some non-traditional partnerships with the Islamic Development Bank and we're in dialogue with them through their secretariat to have an MOU. They had worked very closely with the TFAF and had regional partnerships like the Caribbean Development Bank. As they began to address some of the high cost measures in the strategy, mobilization efforts would have to target larger outlays of financial resources that were required to build human and institutional capacity needed to modernize operation systems, update legislation and administrative procedures. They would look forward to engaging donors sincerely on these efforts.

2.18. The first key message from this presentation was that TFA implementation needs were going to change over time. For small vulnerable island and continental economies, one significant weather event could significantly alter the physical and institutional infrastructures and realities. By extension, this would modify the nature and the extent of capacity building support. This committee would have to be sensitive to these realities in the exercise of its oversight of the Agreement, particularly in respect of Article 17 (Early Warning Mechanism) and Article 19 (Shifting Between Categories B and C).

2.19. The second message was that identifying and engaging donors required time, and it had to be implemented on a dual track; that had been their main challenge. They had approached implementing partners that had the expertise, but they did not have the money. In this regard, they had to match the money with the competence. It had to be done on two tracks and this added an additional layer of difficulty. In addition, there was a problem with aligning funding priorities with the schedules of the donors and the schedules of the implementing partners. That had been difficult.

In some cases, they had been successful in overcoming these challenges by working hand in hand with the implementing partners to mobilize funding.

2.20. The third headline was that several donor Members were channeling their TACB support through bilateral programs. In some cases, this had constrained regional mobilization efforts because the eligibility criteria disqualified some CARICOM members from funding. It went against the spirit of Section II of the TFA and limited access to the resources, and it complicated the mobilization of efforts for CARICOM's membership in its entirety. There was not an infinite source of grant resources available under these existing TF support programs. There were sources available through loans to fund larger projects such as single window, risk management systems. However, loans also increased the levels of indebtedness, and this was also against the spirit of Section II. This was a matter of concern for CARICOM governments. CARICOM would look forward to sincere engagement with the donors. In the same way that Members applauded the receipt of the notifications for category C, they would look forward to applauding the success of implementation in future meetings of the TFC. Implementation could only come through partnerships between the donors, through sincere engagement with developing and least-developed countries.

Presentation by Lao People's Democratic Republic

2.21. The delegate of Lao PDR presented their status of implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. This had been a focus of their accession process since 2013 and had adopted the Agreement upon concluding accession, becoming the first LDC to ratify it. Almost six years after, they would have the trade policy review for accession in 2019. They did not have an agency in charge of trade facilitation, but a secretariat had been established in 2010. A five-year plan had been adopted in 2011 to simplify clearance procedures across the department. The trade portal had been established in 2012, with all information with respect to imports and exports. They had completed accession to the Revised Kyoto Convention in 2016, and this was a notable achievement. They had adopted electronic payments of customs duties using smart cards and successfully launched the single stop inspection facility in 2016 with Viet Nam, at the Lao Bao crossing. An electronic certification for rules of origin (E-COO) had also been launched with help from the EU.

2.22. Among other activities undertaken was the piloting of the National Single Window Program with the electronic import licenses for vehicles; initiating the authorized economic operators program, working under the customs modernization project for fast track clearance; the adoption of the instruction on duty and value-added tax incentives for a master list of enterprises, which concerned internal regulation; the adoption of a road map to improve trade competitiveness and raise global ranking in the Doing Business Index; and the establishment of the national TF Committee. The NTFC was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and vice-chaired by the Minister of Industry and Commerce. There were additional instances of this NTFC with offices at the provincial level, chaired by the deputy governors of the province.

2.23. Using the World Bank indicators for the 2011 Doing Business Index, it had been determined that export took almost 44 days and imports 46 days. In terms of costs, this represented USD 1880 for exports and USD 2035 for imports. With these results Lao PDR had a score of 168, moving to 124 in 2018, and 76 in 2019. The country's score on trading across the border remained high, and further efforts were needed on compliance. There were several unresolved challenges. Non-tariff barriers covered 34% of imports by value, as procedures and timelines for various approvals were not swift enough due to lack of communication between agencies and uncertainty. This happened not only at the central level, but also at the provincial level. There were roadside checks by different enforcement agencies was also an issue, such as police checks on the routes to ports. E-payment does not yet apply to quarantine or other border measures, were multiplicity of payment points was still in place. Finally, cooperation with the private sector was still absent.

2.24. The trade facilitation road map aimed to simplify and streamline clearance procedures and improving the service delivery. It also aimed to reduce time to export and import by 50% and cost of export and import by 30% and raise the Doing Business Index rank from 124 to below 100—to double digits. In addition, they wanted to improve trade competitiveness and attract more foreign investments for enhanced economic growth; this was important for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The roadmap also included an accelerated implementation time frame, with the designation of 13 measures in category A, 6 in category B and 17 in category C with indicative dates for implementation which would be confirmed next year. However, they would hold an internal meeting before the end of 2019 to confirm such indicative dates.

2.25. Action plans had also been developed for seeking technical assistance from development partners for implementing category C measures. So far, they had been mainly supported by the World Bank Group. Previously, they had also received support from the multi-donor trust fund supported by Australia, European Union, Germany, Ireland, USAID and the World Bank Group. This multi-donor trust fund was dealing with the accession and other trade components. For key category C measures, they were working with donors, especially with the World Bank. Cooperation remains outstanding for other provisions in this category.

2.26. The implementation roadmap 2017-2022 had been launched with close monitoring from TFS, also with a directive issued by the Prime Minister. This was an attempt to improve Lao PDR's ease of doing business ranking of the World Bank Group to a double-digit position. For this, the ministry was working on the process to start a business and the costs/time of trading. In addition, they were improving collaboration with ASEAN and the GMS framework.

2.27. The delegate of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanked the opportunity to share their experience. Efforts towards TF reform commenced before the coming into force of the TFA had been formally established by way of a cabinet memorandum in 2011. The NTFC was co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade and the Customs and Excise Department. It consisted of members from both the private and public sector and it had overseen the implementation of the needs assessments as well as customs reforms.

2.28. On 9 January 2017, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines ratified the TFA and subsequently notified all its implementation dates ahead of notification deadlines. Its commitment towards TFA implementation was being advanced on two tracks—at the National Level and at the Regional Level as previously articulated by the representative from CARICOM. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had worked and would continue to work collaboratively with regional and international stakeholders in the quest for trade facilitation reform. With funding assistance of the International Trade Centre (ITC), a consultant had been employed with a mandate to develop project proposals for the category C measures. They were grateful to ITC for their support. Individual project proposals had been written for all category C designated measures—a total of 16—including publication; enquiry points; advance rulings; test procedures; risk management; single window; post clearance audit, formalities for documentation requirements, and general disciplines on fees and charges. Critically, each project proposal had envisaged or identified implementation partners and carefully matched them with possible donors. A number of those identified donors had since been approached to assist in implementing these category C measures. Regrettably, there had been no successful cases to report.

2.29. Nevertheless, preparatory work had started in an effort to implement the first phase of a single window using the ASYCUDA World platform. The first phase was being funded by the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. They had also received assistance from the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC) in terms of building capacity in areas such as risk management and post clearance audit. However, there was still need for financial assistance.

2.30. On the regional track, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was part of a Regional Strategy for the implementation of the TFA in the CARICOM region. This had been developed with input from policy makers, technical experts and other government and private sector agencies across the OECS member States and the broader Caribbean Community. The regional strategy highlighted regional approaches and strategies to support the implementation of the TFA provisions, both collectively and individually.

2.31. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was currently benefitting from UNCTAD's Empowerment Program for National Trade Facilitation Committees, for which they were very thankful to UNCTAD and the OECS Geneva Mission. The first module of this ongoing initiative has been conducted in November 2018. Under this program, current and potential members of the NTFC were trained with the requisite planning skills to implement trade facilitation reforms and to ensure a sustainable National Trade Facilitation Committee. As an additional component of these program, they were in the final stage towards the adoption of a national trade facilitation road map, reflecting their vision for the next five years with corresponding goals and activities to achieve the desired outcome of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of trade facilitation. The Empowerment Program had also played a critical role in helping them determine the category C definitive dates ahead of the 22 August deadline, and were currently undertaking module 2 of this program.

2.32. In January 2019, the WTO had supported a regional border agency coordination workshop in Saint Lucia under the theme: "The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: Supporting Strategic and Effective Implementation in CARICOM." It had been organized by the TFAF, the CARICOM Secretariat, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission in conjunction with other agencies such as Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA), Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), UNCTAD and the WCO. A critical component of this engagement had been the donor dialogue, which had facilitated contact between member States and major international organizations and development partners including: the World Bank Group; the IMF; World Customs Organization; UK/DFID; the European Union; and the Caribbean Development Bank.

2.33. Despite best efforts, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was faced with a number of challenges to fully implement its category C measures. Some of them were being addressed nationally; however, some required forging partnerships with development partners. The most significant challenge in this regard was the lack of financial support. While agencies, as previously mentioned, had been extremely helpful in providing technical expertise, they did not have the financial resources to fund the full implementation of certain initiatives.

2.34. The focus should not be solely on notification but equally, focus should be placed on encouraging donor members and development partners to play their part in making available the requisite support, as previously disclosed in during the category C notification discussions. Some of these challenges were not peculiar only to us but also to OECS and CARICOM countries. The delegate concluded by reminding development partners of the spirit of the negotiations of the Agreement and the special and differential provisions agreed upon to offer technical and financial assistance in order for developing countries to implement the TFA.

Presentation by Zambia: Support from Cooperating Partners and Zambia's Achievements in the Implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement

2.35. The delegate of Zambia shared their experience with seeking support from cooperating partners and the achievements made in implementing TFA provisions. The TFA had been ratified on December 2015. The notification of category designations had been submitted in 2016. In that same year, the NTFC was established. It was co-chaired by the customs authority and the Ministry of Trade and had sub-committees. There was in addition a steering committee, chaired by the secretary to the cabinet. All projects which related to trade facilitation had the steering committee's report to the NTFC, to ensure coherence and synergy. Zambia had conducted a preliminary costing of category C measures in 2015 and had developed an implementation matrix in 2016. Cooperation partners had developed their matrix to ensure that where support had been given, there was no duplication of efforts. A government donor platform had also been established to discuss measures in addition to those being implemented under the Enhanced Integrated Framework, there TF issues had been included in the agenda.

2.36. The idea of coordinating the cooperation partners was to ensure that gaps were identified to prevent duplication in efforts; achieve synergy in implementation and ensure that limited resources were used effectively. Under the NTFC, Zambia had a partially funded secretariat for consultants. UNCTAD had supported through the Empowerment Program, where members of the NTFC were trained on the Agreement and how to do the notifications. So far, the outstanding issues related to the establishment of a full-time secretariat and support to procure the implementation of monitoring software.

2.37. Under Article 1.2 of the TFA (Information Available Through the Internet), USAID has assisted in developing the portal. The issues of sustainability were coming up as additional needs for support. On Article 1.3 (Enquiry Points), they were working with the World Bank Group to streamline operations of the enquiry points but there was work required to ensure that these were effectively operational. Test procedures required significant investments in infrastructure, where they had very limited support—the EU had provided support and laboratories, but this had not covered all existing needs. Harmonization of payment points had taken place in March 2018, in line with Article 6.1. Four agencies had been connected so far (Zambia Compulsory Standards Agency, Zambia Metrology Agency, Road Traffic Safety Agency and the Zambezi River Authority), but additional agencies remained. Almost all of the commercial banks had good facilities for electronic payment (Articles 7.3), therefore issues remaining concerned sustainability and awareness.

2.38. The AEO program had started before the Agreement, and there were 54 registered AEOs at the time. However, the system was operated in silos and there was a need to ensure coherence in the implementation of the system. There was an Act in place for border agency cooperation (Article 8)—the Border Management and Trade Facilitation Act No. 12 of 2019, which established an NTF, a one-stop border post, designated the lead agency (Zambia Revenue Authority), harmonized working hours, among other issues. They were currently looking at working on regulations and support the implementation of the Act. The WCO had provided assistance through the Mercator Program, but issues such as electronic certification, stakeholder education on documentation requirements remained among issues that required additional support. A single window had been established, but it required substantial support, especially connection to the governments wide area network and there were also sustainability issues.

2.39. The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation had been working on Article 10.6 (Use of Customs Brokers). They were evaluating modules for training of customs brokers as well as freight forwarders. The issues of capacity building were also among things that we require additional support. A one-stop border post had been established, in line with Article 12 of the TFA (Customs Cooperation). There were various cooperating partners including the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, SADC, JICA, DFID and other bilateral partners. So far there were one-stop border posts operating at Chirundu and Nakonde. Future plans included Kasumbalesa, Mwami, Katuma Mulilo, Victoria Falls, as well as Kazungula. In conclusion, Zambia was making steady progress towards implementation of trade facilitation measures. The delegate also thanked cooperating partners.

2.40. The delegate of Bangladesh thanked the Secretariat and the TFAF team lead by Sheri Rosenow for the updates on notification and ratification of the TFA and TFAF activities. He also appreciated Members who had shared their best practices. Bangladesh believed that implementation of the TFA could reduce time, cost, procedural delays in cross border trade and enhance the efficiency of trade transaction; since the TFA focused on simplification, standardization, modernization and harmonization of import-export procedure and expedites the movement, release and clearance of goods including goods in transit, its effective implementation benefits to consumers, traders, entrepreneurs and governments. Likewise, the TFA implementation was critical for regional integration. Bangladesh considered trade as its engine of growth and accordingly, government had taken different initiatives for mainstreaming the trade into its economic development plans.

2.41. Bangladesh's growth mainly depended on trade, particularly export trade, though its trade baskets, as well as trade markets, were very limited. Bangladesh believed that full implementation of TFA measures would expedite achieving its national goals. With this view, Bangladesh had ratified the TFA Agreement on 27 September 2016, and had submitted its category notifications within due time. Bangladesh had also notified its arrangements and progress and needs of technical assistance for capacity building support for full implementation of category C measures. Bangladesh had identified 13 measures for technical assistance under Category C. Out of these 13 measures, they had already received assistance commitment from the development partners for 8 measures, though in some cases the commitment had been partial. The delegate thanked development partners specifically USAID, ADB and the World Bank Group who had already made commitments to assist Bangladesh. He hoped other development partners would come forward to assist Bangladesh so that they could fulfil the requirements of TFA.

2.42. To get the benefits of the TFA, full implementation was mandatory. In some areas of category C measures, Bangladesh had received partial assistance commitments from the development partners but needed help for the remaining parts of these measures. For example, assistance was required under Article 1.3 to establish enquiry points for non-customs issues; under Article 7.4 (Risk Management) they required assistance for quality laboratory facilities for the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute, the Food Safety Authority, the Animal Health Department, the Fisheries Department, and the Plant Quarantine Department. Support was also needed for data standard management in the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), under Article 10.4 (Single Window).

2.43. Bangladesh requested development partners to come forward with their commitments where assistance was still lacking. For example, a commitment was needed for the implementation of measures under Article 7.9 (Perishable Goods); Article 8 (Border Agency Cooperation) both in-country and cross-country; Formalities and Documentation Requirements related to perishable goods under Article 10.1.1(a); and Freedom of Transit under Articles 11.5, 11.9, 11.16.

2.44. It was imperative that the support was not confined to address border level issues, as it also needed to focus equally on behind the border issues. Likewise, there should be a balance between hardware and software. Bangladesh would look forward to receiving meaningful cooperation from the Members as well as the developed partners. Though securing donor assistance was thought to be a major challenge, prompt response from the USAID, ADB and the World Bank Group had been helpful in mitigating the implementation challenges for TFA measures. Bangladesh's experience with development partners in this respect had been very positive. For example, in many measures, such donor assistance helped Bangladesh to be able to score as category A (e.g. in advance rulings, publication in the internet (through Trade Portal and Customs Portal). Secondly, Bangladesh Customs had undergone significant reforms since the early 1990s through many donor-funded programs. As a result, Customs had been more advanced in implementing TFA measures; other government agencies were not at same level. Therefore, implementation of TFA measures would remain critical challenges for them. Bangladesh thanked developed members and development partners for the support that had been provided so far and would like to encourage them to provide additional support in line with TFA to address the need and priority as an LDC Member.

2.45. The delegate of Nigeria commended the panelists for the insightful presentations, particularly that from CARICOM. He underscored the importance of technical assistance and support for capacity building, as well as the importance of ensuring that the guiding principles of Article 21 of the TFA were strictly adhered to. There was a joint responsibility between development partners and recipient countries to be able to advance the implementation agenda. Since 2017, Nigeria had organized a series of technical workshops at the technical level, in particular for NTFC members. The workshops had been organized with the objective of building capacities, but more importantly with a view to drafting a 3 to 5-year trade facilitation implementation roadmap, as well as key performance indicators. The outgoing roadmap was still valid today, and for that they thanked the support received from USAID. Nevertheless, it required further review of progress made. According to the update provided by the Secretariat and the TFA Database, Nigeria needed to notify the arrangements and progress on the provision of technical assistance and support for capacity building; this would be later confirmed. Nigeria had been engaging with donors and development partners with a view to ensuring commitments for project and implementation plan, on the basis of their needs' assessment exercise. He concurred with CARICOM in that TFA implementation plans were not static, particularly in the areas of digital trade and e-commerce. Members should reflect more on that.

2.46. One of the recommendations that came out of the TF monitoring report and gap analysis was the need to prioritize completion of the trade portal. This had been mentioned the previous day of meetings and it was of their interest that UNCTAD was aware of this need. A second point to highlight was the support needed for sustainability of TFA implementation, especially in terms of monitoring, evaluation and institutional support. Linked to that was the appropriate capacity building that would allow monitoring and evaluation. The last takeaway from this exercise was that some government agencies were not fully automated and not connected to a centralized system. There was also a lack of technical knowledge of the inner workings of the TFA and inadequate financial capacity to implement TF measures. The delegate informed that an additional challenge was the non-passage of the Nigerian Customs and Excise Management Act, without which TF reform would be difficult.

2.47. Nigeria appreciated development partners that had shown interest, and recognized they were not lacking in attention. However, their intention was to fast-track the process as it was taking more than they had anticipated. As mentioned by CARICOM, there was the notification of the various commitments, but there was also the agenda for implementation, the timeframe and the capacity to implement. In their self-designation process, they had determined that shorter implementation periods for category B were beneficial. That time had gone by quickly. The Committee also had an oversight function and the delegate wondered if another Member could point out any backtracking, but they did not have the capacity to comply with some commitments on their own. He shared with the Committee that in their experience, waiting too long was not the best course of action. It was important for Members to seriously consider the time element in the notifications.

2.48. The delegate of Ghana commended the panelists for sharing their experiences. He shared that identification and engagement with donors took time and posed a substantive challenge when not addressed in a timely manner. This could hinder the implementation of TFA commitments. Ghana had notified its category C measures and definitive dates, as well as the corresponding technical assistance and capacity building needs in compliance with the dates provided in the TFA. They had initial engagements and meetings with donors in capital and had followed up with letters and

presentations of their needs for assistance and capacity building to indicate priority areas and opportunities for collaboration. Unfortunately, the response from the donor partners had not been forthcoming. Out of 23 category C measures, only 5 had received either partial or full commitments from the donors to provide assistance. In that regard, the delegate commended the USAID and the World Bank Group, as well as UNCTAD, and in particular the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation led by GIZ for their support. He concluded by calling all important partners to provide adequate and timely technical assistance support to enable Ghana to fulfil its commitments under the TFA.

2.49. The delegate of Paraguay thanked previous speaker and updated the Committee on progress made on TFA implementation. One of such achievements had been the publication of average release times on the trade portal. It considered various regimes and all stages of the process—transport, release and delivery, as well as the times for to complete some formalities through the single window. They had also progressed on the participation of the private sector in the early publication of new standards and rules with future implementation dates. ALADI and Chile had teamed up to collaborate with Paraguay on the issue of the trade portal, where now it was possible to calculate import duties and taxes, as well as the required documentation. They had implemented the authorized economic operator program in 2018, with support from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization against Terrorism, and specialists from the Dominican Republic. It had been a positive experience and thanked them for their collaboration. There were other initiatives to fight corruption where they had worked with IATA. The customs clearance process had been completely digitalized and now had information regarding the goods that would be inspected. Advances in risk management included big data technology. The next challenge was the use of blockchain for transit purposes. The delegate thanked the WCO for their support and the World Bank Group for the input to improve risk management and strategic planning.

2.50. The representative from Paraguay Customs informed they were at the initial phase of implementation of a global trade helpdesk, with funding from the EU, UNCTAD and ITC. ALADI had also partnered in this initiative. Other development partners included the US Department of Agriculture. They were also part of the program for the empowerment of National Trade Facilitation Committees of UNCTAD, which they considered to be very positive and hoped would continue moving forward.

2.51. The delegate of Switzerland enquired about the set-up of the sub-committees in Lao PDR's NTFC and the interplay across national and sub-national levels.

2.52. The delegate of Nepal spoke also on behalf of the LDC Group. She thanked the WTO for the funding of capital-based officials to attend the Committee and the multiple side events and workshops that had been organized at the sidelines. The experience had been useful, including the experience sharing by Members. In addition, she thanked the Secretariat for the upkeep of the TFA Database. There had been progress on the submission of instruments of ratification, with 146 Members having notified the Agreement. Similarly, 188 had notified their category A commitments, 96 for category B and 86 for category C. The notification deadline for category A commitments for the LDC Group had been on 22 February 2018. The participation of multilateral stake holders including development partners, the discussions and presentations on donor coordination, sessions on trade facilitation and SPS, trade and natural disaster nexus, among others, remained significant as they helped to understand the various perspectives and the dynamics of Trade Facilitation Agreement. She thanked delegations and others who had shared in this regard. The session by UNOHRLLS seemed significant, bearing in mind the mid-term review of the Vienna Program of Action (VPoA). As the VPoA was halfway along implementation and at the eve of mid-term review, comments and feedback to be received from the participants would be highly significant as feedback could be used as inputs for the VPoA.

2.53. As the focal point on trade Facilitation at the LDC Group, Nepal valued the importance of implementation of the TFA, as it had an impact on reducing delays and costs of cross-border trade. Without external support from development partners, it would be very difficult for LDC Members to implement the category C commitments. The delegate urged development partners to notify their technical assistance plans under Article 22 of the Agreement in an annual basis, and make sure that the support was demand-driven and tailor-made to the specific context of LDCs. He thanked the TFAF and Summit Alliance International for having accepted their request in organizing the LDC Second Retreat in June and preparing the LDC profile on TFA implementation. Finally, he thanked developed Members and development partners for the support provided so far and called upon them to provide additional support in line with TFA to address the needs and priority of the LDC Members.

2.54. The delegate of El Salvador thanked the panelists for the excellent presentations and the WTO Secretariat for the organization of the various seminars and workshops, as well as the regular committee meeting and this dedicated session on technical assistance. The national plan on trade facilitation had been approved the previous week and, in addition to setting out the roadmap for joint work between the private sector and the public sector, it established a more ambitious objective which consisted in the designing of the National Strategy on Trade Facilitation 2019-2024. They were certain that one of the main players on the implementation of the 60 actions provided for by the plan would be the cooperating bodies as well as the countries that provide support through capacity building. The Minister of Economy would be making the necessary contacts to manage cooperation required for implementation.

2.55. The delegate of Uruguay reported on the "First Latin American Meeting of the National Trade Facilitation Committees: Cooperation between the Agencies Intervening in the Border", organized by the WTO TFAF and the General Secretariat of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI). This meeting would take place in Montevideo, Uruguay on 25-29 November 2019. The main objective would be to improve the capacity of the Trade Facilitation Committees of Latin American countries to successfully implement the Agreement on Trade Facilitation. The meeting would emphasize the need to improve cooperation between the agencies involved in the border. In order to achieve this objective, participants would carry out a series of exercises to share experiences with their peers in the region, as well as to discuss best practices related to the establishment of the road map, monitoring and evaluation, and in particular the operation of other NTFCs. The workshop would promote an exchange of experiences among the Members of the National Trade Facilitation Committees so that areas of mutual learning and possible areas of collaboration could be identified. The workshop would provide an opportunity to exchange national experiences in cooperation between the agencies involved in the border. It would also strengthen the capacity of participants for better supervision and better evaluation of national trade facilitation reforms while strengthening the capacity of participants to formulate the need for technical assistance and draft proposals.

2.56. The Plurilateral State of Bolivia thanked the panelists for their presentations, as well as those Members who participated in the experience sharing exercise. This had enabled them to understand and grasp all the different implementation approaches being implemented around the globe. On 22 September 2019, Bolivia had launched a global program for trade facilitation. This was a joint initiative aimed at providing technical assistance in Bolivia, in particular for the national customs authority, with a view to facilitating through the implementation of national standards and better practices for the import, export and transit of goods. The national executive committee for the program had been created, and while it did not replace the NTFC, it would be involved in the implementation of Article 3 of the agreement. In line with what had been requested by the NTFC, Bolivia was working with the World Bank Group on various activities.

2.57. The delegate of Senegal thanked the panelists for sharing their experiences, and the Secretariat for having enabled them to attend this meeting. She provided a summary of their national programs and an overview of the issues they had faced in mobilizing technical assistance for implementation projects. Since 2015, Senegal had established a national program for technical and financial assistance for the implementation of category C measures, with support from the ITC. Further to the establishment of this program, which included 9 projects, 6 additional projects had benefitted from the support of USAID since 2017; this included a portal on information launched in June 2018, and the implementation of a program for authorized economic operators who had benefitted from specific training projects on organizational and institutional capacity building. The sub-committee had benefitted from a capacity building program on training, communication and the implementation of category B and C measures. Senegal had made significant progress; however, they were experiencing two constraints on which they drew the attention from financial and technical partners. First, the NTFC was not involved had not been involved in all matters concerning trade facilitation. In this regard, NTFCs should be acknowledged by all technical partners when conducting visits and meetings for projects. The second concerned was the approach of making funds available for the implementation of projects. Each partner had its own approach and sometimes there was no follow-up, especially near the end of an assistance project.

2.58. Senegal had a financial assistance program in place since 2015, but only certain components had been implemented, leaving others behind, when all these components contributed to the ultimate goal of implementation of category C provisions. The recommendation would be that the dialogue with technical and financial partners be improved and that there be a joint assessment of the implementation of these projects.

2.59. The delegate of Trinidad and Tobago echoed the statement by the representative of CARICOM and noted that Trinidad and Tobago was committed to the regional coordinated approach for implementation of the TFA, which was also being streamlined with the national implementation. Trinidad and Tobago's experience had been with the hemispheric funding organizations, mainly the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). The IADB was currently pursuing a project for the strengthening of the single electronic window—TTBizLink. In view of Trinidad and Tobago's commitments to implementation of the TFA, they had decided to implement over ten of the category C commitments through this mechanism. However, Trinidad and Tobago had been unable to fund all the reforms and initiatives necessary for the implementation of category C commitments. Access to donor funding was normally subject to the country meeting specific criteria such as national income. While the TFA outlined that developing countries were to be provided with donor support to implement its category C commitments, the support was not always easily available for all. In some instances, the criteria set out for access to these initiatives limited the options available to countries. This limited availability of options had therefore propelled the pursuance of loan funding. This had other impacts on a countries' economy. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, they were experiencing an increase in public-sector debt to GDP ratio, which according to the latest WTO trade policy review, rose from approximately 38% in 2012 to 62% in 2017. As such, Trinidad and Tobago would appreciate funding that would allow them to meet their obligations under the TFA without the burden of debt. The delegate reiterated the need for support to be provided to all developing countries and LDCs for implementation of its category C commitments.

2.60. The delegate of Samoa thanked the presenters for the sharing of experiences. Regarding the presentation from CARICOM, he wished to highlight the call for the understanding of the Committee and of donors that implementation support changed over time in Samoa and in the Pacific region, as they were vulnerable to many challenges that are out of our control. These challenges had made trade facilitation a critical strategic area of great importance to the country. Their experience showed that as national officials had been identifying current projects which were not related to the TFA, they had an impact on category C provisions. This observation was made to avoid project overlapping on similar projects by different donors, which could address category C provisions. In this sense, the assistance or activities related to the implementation of the TFA had been set up through different arrangements and not necessarily because of or initiated from the TFA. For instance, Australia and New Zealand were funding, under PACER Plus, a trade information portal with the assistance of UNCTAD, which could address Article 1.2 (Information Available Through the Internet). This project was different from the TFA and not directly initiated from it. Aside from that observation, it was yet too early for Samoa to provide lessons learned or best practices, since the majority of projects were still ongoing, nearing completion, or had not yet found donor support.

2.61. The delegate of Sri Lanka informed they were experiencing a series of difficulties in implementing the Articles, especially category C Articles. The NTFC comprised 16 governmental agencies and seven chambers. Sri Lanka Customs was the leading agency which performed more than 75% of border activities. Other agencies were having serious problems especially infrastructure issues, legal expertise and IT capacities. The delegate thanked the European Union, the ITC, the World Bank Group, UNCTAD, USAID through their Commercial Law Development Program, Australia Aid and GIZ for the support provided so far, as well as the WTO TFAF. Donors had provided important initial assistance for conducting workshops and seminars. However, this type of assistance would not contribute to the full implementation of provisions in category C, particularly post clearance audit, risk management, advanced rulings, etc.

2.62. They had received donorship from the World Bank Group to implement the Trade Information Portal, which was running successfully. Nevertheless, in order to streamline some additional features, especially making it user-friendly, support had been provided by GIZ. Sri Lanka Customs had conducted a time release study in 2018 and had released a report in 2019. Donorship had been provided under EU funds and had been managed by the ITC. Technical assistance had been provided by the WCO, and the delegate thanked them for conducting the TRS and identifying the bottlenecks in the Sri Lankan border context.

2.63. The delegate of Japan thanked the informative presentations and interventions and introduced Japan's approach to assistance and support for capacity building. Every year, Japan provided a voluntary contribution to the Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF) which had been established to pursue customs cooperation programs provided by the WCO. While Japan continued to contribute to the WCO's activities to support the implementation of the TFA under its Mercator program, Japan had also been providing bilateral customs cooperation since 1996. Japan's customs invited trainees and

experts with a view to promoting the implementation of the TFA. For instance, in January 2019, they had a one-week training program in Japan and invited 10 trainees from overseas to participate in it. The program had been organized based on a request for Japan to share its experiences and best practices regarding the implementation of certain Articles of the TFA, namely Article 7.1 (Pre-Arrival Processing), Article 7.8 (Expedited Shipments) and Article 11.9 on advance filing and processing of transit documentation and data. In response to that request, Japan had shared their practices for utilising advance data and special customs clearance procedures for expedited shipments. The training program had included an onsite visit to the Japan customs offices and a private warehouse so that the trainees could understand actual operations of customs procedures in Japan. Throughout the course of the training sessions many questions had been asked and answered and by making comparisons with their own systems, the trainees had been able to identify issues to address upon their return home.

2.64. The delegate of the Dominican Republic thanked previous speakers. The Dominican Republic was highly committed to TFA implementation—more than 70% of measures had been notified in category A, and categories B and C had been notified before the timeframe set out in the TFA. They thanked countries and association from whom they had received technical assistance, since before the TFA was a reality. Donors decided that type of specific assistance was made available and which was specifically provided. While the Dominican Republic remained open to receive donations, counselling, advisory work and diagnosis. However, they had not received responses concerning the actual implementation of programs where they already had diagnostics and plans. For example, in the case of single window and risk management, several recommendations and analysis had been made by various donors and international organizations. These studies had identified the needs, but they wished to focus more on specific assistance to procure the necessary information systems, computers, training, x-ray examination units and training. It was important then that developing countries could have access to technical and financial assistance that tailored to their own needs.

2.65. The delegate of Côte d'Ivoire thanked the Secretariat for making it possible for them to attend this meeting. He congratulated previous speakers and noted that there were several interesting cases which showed the substantial progress that had been made in the implementation of the provisions of the agreement. While they had made progress concerning the single window, they needed additional support for some outstanding components, for example electronic payment and risk. They had received support from USAID and the World Bank Group for the establishment of the trade portal, which was not complete yet. They hoped that the result could be similar to the example provided by Jamaica. Concerning Article 11 (Freedom of Transit), a survey had been carried out to determine how to improve and heighten the monitoring of cargo, working with USAID. Nevertheless, the system was not yet in place. They indicated to need more support in this area. They also had support from USAID in launching the pilot phase of the AEO program. The official launching was still pending, as they had yet to assess if all the criteria had been complied with and to how many operators it could apply to. Under Articles 6.1 and 6.2, Cote d'Ivoire had also received backing from USAID for mapping royalties. They were looking for additional support to publish these results. The delegate concluded by thanking all partners that had provided support for implementation.

2.66. The delegate of Peru thanked the WTO, Members and that various development partners that had provided substantial information. Peru had obtained bilateral support by the Swiss Cooperation within their competition for five different measures—risk management, competition at the border, AEO, notification of reinforced inspections. This had concerned the implementation of category C measures; however, they saw a need to improve the measures in category A.

2.67. The delegate of Honduras thanked panelists for their presentations and the Secretariat for allowing Honduras to participate in this meeting. The NTFC had been set up in January 2018, with participation of the public and private sector. She thanked USAID for the support provided and the various organizations that had been a part of this process.

2.68. The delegate of Lao PDR answered the question from the Swiss delegation. As he had explained, there had been a TF secretariat before there was an NTFC. The deputy Prime Minister was the chair, with the Minister of Industry and Commerce as deputy chair. This was working at the central level. Provincial sub-committees had been established under the same model, chaired by the deputy of government from the province and vice-chaired by head of the provincial department. The focal point remained the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and their instances at the provincial level.

2.69. The delegate of Nepal highlighted issues that were important for Nepal as a land-locked country. Their studies showed that not having coasts increased the cost of trading by 20%. The TFA was more important for landlocked LDCs. Nepal was increasing its links and connections, through transit facilities through its southern, northern and eastern borders. However, the trade cost of Nepal was still high in comparison to other landlocked countries. The logistic performance index (LPI) of Nepal was not that encouraging in the study by World Bank Group despite improvement in the Doing Business Index. Nepal required support to improve the implementation of transit obligations under Article 11.

2.70. The Committee took note of the statements made under Sections I, II and III of the Dedicated Session.

II. REVIEW OF DONOR NOTIFICATIONS AS SET FORTH IN ARTICLE 22 OF THE TFA

2.71. The delegate of the European Union informed several EU member States would be taking the floors to share their experience on aid provided to the developing countries and LDCs for the implementation of the TFA. She thanked Members for the presentations made and took note of the lessons learned to report back to capital. It had been recalled that NTFCs were crucial and she highlighted that the EU assistance program supported the establishment of NTFCs and provided capacity building in that regard. In light of the many statements that referred to assistance provided by the WCO, the EU invited them to comment on their experience and approach in assisting countries on TFA implementation.

2.72. The representative of the World Customs Organization thanked the Membership for this invitation. The WCO had launched the Mercator program in 2014 as a program aimed at assisting Members in implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement, but also implementing TFA measures more broadly. Five years after its launch in March 2019, a report had been published on the implementation of the program to take stock of the results achieved. The report was publicly available on the WCO website. The program was possible due to the donors that were providing support. With the aim of achieving the necessary coordination of activities, they were also working very closely with the different development partners, including the TFAF.

2.73. The tailor-made track of the Mercator program was specially designed to meet specific needs of the individual Members or sub-regions. There were currently over 40 Members benefitting from the so-called Mercator program under the tailor-made track which was based on medium to long-term engagement with Members and adopted a project-based approach. It also included a significant role for WCO accredited experts, in particular Mercator program advisors (MPA). There were currently almost 100 MPAs. Depending on the availability of funding, Members benefitted from both the core Mercator program support, which included scoping and implementation planning, as well as support on specific technical and organizational development recommendations raised in the Mercator program scoping mission report.

2.74. The Mercator scoping missions were a combination of tools to access the implementation of TFA Articles depending on TF notifications, previous diagnostics and other national circumstances. Up to 41 measures were analysed together with associated organizational enabling and institutional arrangements. Complex TFA Articles such as risk management, post-clearance audit, measurement of release times and authorized operators were sustained in a holistic engagement needed for effective implementation. Multi-year implementation support also enabled complimentary organizational development support, encompassing matters of leadership management training, e-learning and competency based human resource management.

2.75. In terms of specific recommendations for the Mercator program scoping missions, approximately 60% concern implementation of technical trade facilitation procedures. The remaining 40% of recommendations related to organizational development, institutional arrangement, technology and enforcement related management issues. Following a scoping diagnostic report, the WCO and the concerned Member administration discussed the recommendations. Once clarified and confirmed, the next activity was implementation planning or updating an existing reform and modernization plan. In addition to this long and medium-term support, the WCO also provided short term support to address specific needs of the Members, for example, in the areas of authorized economic operators, time release study, risk management, transit, the WCO data model etc. This support was based on over 50 WCO instruments and tools which had been produced by the WCO

and its membership through the comprehensive WCO committee structure. For more information on this program, Members could refer to the Mercator program report and more information on their website.

2.76. The delegate of the European Union commented on previous statements to introduce EU aid programs. She noted that Lao PDR expressed its needs for category C commitments. The ASEAN Regional Integration Support by the EU, called ARISE+, had been launched last 10 September and this was available to Lao PDR to meet their specific requests. She encouraged the delegation of Lao PDR to contact the EU delegation in the country. They had contacted the Ministry in Zambia about available funds, and the ongoing trade facilitation regional program that would be implemented through COMESA, which also contributed to the implementation of the category C commitments of Zambia. The programs were called "Result to Enhanced Implementation", and it had a budget of about EUR 2 million, to finance activities such as the identification of gap and needs of the Member in the context of the WTO TFA, and it could provide capacity building on implementation, depending on the country's specific needs. She encouraged the delegation of Zambia to contact the EU delegation in the country. The EU had taken note of the needs expressed by Bangladesh. There would be a bilateral meeting of the trade committee with Bangladesh and the EU on 20 October, and this would be addressed as well.

2.77. There were two basic elements of EU assistance in the area of trade facilitation. From the entry into force of the Agreement, the EU and its member States had committed to mobilize at least EUR 400 million in trade facilitation assistance over a five-year period, including for projects improving developing countries' customs systems. Specifically, EU Aid for Trade prioritized Trade Facilitation Agreement provisions notified as category C. The EU's Aid for Trade (Aft) Strategy had been adopted in October 2007 in response to the WTO-led Aft Initiative to help developing countries better integrate into the international trading system and take greater advantage of poverty-reducing benefits of economic openness and enhanced trade efficiency. In context of the 2030 Agenda, the EU Aft Strategy had been subsequently updated in 2017. The strategy's objectives—the reduction of poverty and the integration of developing countries into world trade—remained unchanged. However, in the advancement of new instruments, such as the European External Investment Plan (EIP), the vision for EU Aft had evolved to deliver the high volume of EU Aft in an effective and impactful way, to seek complementarity between EU trade and development policies and to increase its effectiveness in the LDCs as priority.

2.78. EU Aft encompassed a third of EU projects and programs supporting trade and productive capacities in developing countries. EU Aft operated within the partner countries and regions' trade and economic policies as mainstreamed into their development strategies. It played a vital role in building the capacity of developing countries to negotiate and implement such agreements. The EU also worked with key actors in partner countries, across many areas and types of aid, from strengthening the capacity of local government and private sector, to the facilitation of customs procedures and compliance with safety, technical and quality standards. EU Aft maintained a high degree of flexibility in order to incorporate the development cooperation implications of WTO topics relating to both existing negotiations and commitments. Multilateral and bilateral trade agreements which partner countries adhered to, including the TFA, Free Trade Agreements and Economic Partnership Agreements, were strong drivers for reform that EU Aft supported and built on to scale up the development impact. In Africa specifically, implementation of the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) would be one of such drivers.

2.79. During the 7th Global Aid for Trade Review at the WTO in July of this year, the EU had launched its EU Aid for Trade Progress Report. The report reflected the prioritization of a stronger coherence between EU and member State's development priorities and trade and investment instruments, with a view to improve the economic, job creation and sustainability impacts. The report itself was based on both qualitative data extracted from the OECD Development Assistance Committee Credit Reporting System, as well as qualitative information conveyed by EU Delegations, including information on projects from member States in developing countries. The report included information on Aft related to trade facilitation. More than half of the countries where EU delegations were surveyed had or intended to request assistance to implement provisions of the TFA. The EU was ready to respond to this, including supporting the establishment and effective cooperation of the National Committees for Trade Facilitation.

2.80. As EU Aft actions continued to expand and deepen, the establishment of an active NCTF in developing countries was indeed pivotal to these actions. NCTFs were composed of a dynamic

working group of implementing agencies (e.g. Customs, Port Authorities), public institutions (e.g. Ministry of Transport) and the Private Sector (e.g. importers and exporters, carriers and shipping associations). In 2018, the EU had provided a full and clear overview to the WTO of current projects in the Aid for Trade Facilitation spectrum and could provide key and concise updates for 2019. The EU and its member States were among the main donors regarding trade facilitation, with commitments reaching EUR 154 million in 2017. We have clear examples of EU-funded regional and country programs that are actively contributing towards trade facilitation efforts in partner countries. Examples of EU Aid for Trade Programs in the area of Trade Facilitation included: first, the West Africa Trade Facilitation Program, jointly commissioned by the EU (EUR 20 million), the World Bank Group and GIZ, commenced in September 2018 which was improving and effectively implementing trade facilitation measures at the regional and national levels, encouraging a more efficient movement of goods along selected corridors and reducing barriers for small-scale traders, with an emphasis on improving conditions for female traders in particular. Second, the COMESA Program on Small-Scale Cross-Border Trading (EUR 15 million) was increasing the formalization of informal cross-border trade and enhancing small-scale cross-border trade flows in the COMESA/tripartite region, leading to increased fiscal revenues for governments as well as to increased security and higher incomes for small-scale cross-border traders. Third, the INTEC (*Integración Económica Regional Centroamericana*) Program (EUR 20.5 million) was a flagship program for trade facilitation in Central America with the specific objective of reducing the regional constraints to competitiveness and diversification in this region, by supporting trade facilitation and increasing capacity to trade in goods and services. In addition, the Support to Investment, Competitiveness and Trade in Central Asia Program (EUR 31.2 million), focused on five countries (i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Mongolia), would promote international trade in Central Asia, as Kazakhstan, for instance, focused on transforming its growth model away from reliance on natural resource extraction. Along with policy makers, ministries, private sector representative, and larger companies expected to benefit from trade facilitation reforms, the program would map trade regulations and procedures and publish them through online National Trade Facilitation Platforms, in compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Furthermore, the Program would provide capacity building for women's associations to increase skills and confidence to advocate for their rights as traders and participate in the work of trade institutions, including NCTF.

2.81. At the country level, the EU Trade-Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) Program (EUR 4.55 million) had allowed Afghanistan to advance swiftly in implementing the WTO TFA. Specifically, the EU had supported the Afghan government to categorize TFA commitments—including category C—and supported the Afghan NTFC through increased private sector involvement, technical training and the promotion of inter-agency collaboration. Furthermore, within the AfT portfolio, the EU supported the establishment and effective operation of the NCTFs. For example, EU funding in Cameroon had contributed to training officials of the Ministry of Commerce to finalize a road map of its NTFC, operational since 2016. This road map would define the measures and priorities of TFA implementation, including the allocation of measures under category and C notifications. In Haiti, the Ministry of Trade had organized two meetings with other concerned ministries, the private sector and the EU to prepare a process to finalize the needs assessment of the category C commitments and subsequently establish the country's own NTFC. Furthermore, in Sri Lanka, the EU Trade Development Project supported the Government's Trade Information Portal. The Portal streamlined documentation necessary for import and export and provided regulatory information to traders. Hosted by the Department of Commerce with the NTFC, the Portal helped to improve predictability and transparency of Sri Lanka's business environment by providing the domestic and foreign business communities and investors with timely access to trade rules and regulations.

2.82. Regarding EU programs that are about to be launched, the program SEED+ on systematic exchange of electronic data was a 4-year project with an implementing period between October 2019 to December 2022, and an allocated amount of EUR 5.3 million that benefited the WB6 countries and Moldova and was implemented by CEFTA. The project aimed at securing the needed maintenance to the current SEED whilst developing new elements to enhance progressive harmonization and transparency of procedures among involved beneficiaries. In turn, this enabled electronic exchange of trade documents in WB in line with the provisions and actions agreed upon in AP5

2.83. Regarding the EU Tunisia cooperation, the EU was implementing a EUR 90 million budget support program in support of competitiveness and exports which covered the following aspects: digitalization of a number of trade procedures ("*titre du commerce extérieur*", "*visa d'embarquement*" and "*avis d'arrivée des marchandises*"); publication of a trade procedures guide

to ensure transparency of procedures and facilitate cross-border operations (relates to Article 10.1. in the notification table); improving the performance of the Sectoral Technical Centres (responsible for testing imported and exported products - relates to Article 5.3. in the notification table); reduction of the number of imported and exported products subjected to technical controls (related to Article 7.5. in the notification table); increased productivity of the Radès Harbor operations, which channeled 80% of trade by sea; and an increase in the number of AEOs (related to Article 7.7. in the notification table). Finally, upon request by the Tunisian authorities, the EU had organized several targeted events and activities in Tunisia using the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX). TAIEX programs were largely needs-driven and deliver appropriate tailor-made expertise to address issues at short notice through workshops, expert missions, and/or study visits. The EU had such programs in the area of customs with the Western Balkans and other countries and would consider additional support that could target trade facilitation activities if the Tunisian authorities expressed a clear, and structured need for such activities to support the implementation of Tunisia TFA commitments.

2.84. The delegate then passed the floor to several member States that presented their own experience of TF implementation of their aid programs.

2.85. The delegate of Sweden recognized the role of enhancing development and poverty reduction. Their support to enhance trade among LDCs and contributions to the removal of impediments for trade constituted an integral part of Swedish development assistance. There were different modalities in which the Swedish Aid was channeled. At the global level, the Swedish assistance was channeled through several multinational agencies such as the World Bank Group, WTO, among others who were supporting the EIF facility and the STDF facility, and with the World Bank Group support as a multi-donor trust fund on trade. Sweden was also an important supporter of the WCO. At the regional level, Sweden had supported the WCO in implementing part of the TFA Agreement, through projects regarding customs modernization. Sweden was also supporting an African organization which dealt with trade policy training and provided training in the area of trade policy and law. Additional support at the regional level in Africa was provided in collaboration with the Trade Law Centre which provided training and capacity building. Support to the trade sector was becoming integrated in their bilateral programs. The delegate encouraged countries where Sweden had bilateral offices to contact them to explore possibilities of further cooperation.

2.86. The delegate of Spain indicated there were two important factors to look at, both from the point of view of the host country and the expert country. For the host country, it was important that all authorities had political will and that all civil servants were engaged from day one. The experts, on the other hand, had to be clear on their knowledge of the issue at hand and ensuring that the national officials trusted their capacities. Spain had been working with Guatemala, through accredited experts. This process had involved a week of hard work. The first part involved a desk-based approach, which was done from experts' offices to analyze the countries in terms of their qualities, capacities, and the issues. Once that was done, they set up a schedule of 5-8 days of meetings.

2.87. One of the issues they had encountered in implementing Article 1 was hardware. Additionally, in some cases, the legislation conflicted with the TFA obligations. It was important that before there was an IT service to comply with this obligation, there was a centralized physical contact point for all this information. In Article 3 (Advance Rulings), their support was related to adding value by looking at complex classification questions, when there are exemptions, taxes and others. In Article 5, they have faced difficulties with second tests, because it varies significantly across countries. Inter-agency communication has also been a challenge. Set dates and periodical analysis have been an issue in implementing Article 6, and lack of knowledge about the responsible authority. Quite serious problems had arose concerning the implementation of single window as it was something new and there were different approaches. Simplified declarations were also an issue. In the EU, if the documents or information were incomplete, there were still ways to release goods. This was not the case in many countries, and this showed the need for a system in a prudent time. Urgent deliveries, such as e-commerce, who are using courier routes, often tried to avoid paying tariffs and there was a need for a global approach to this. Difficulties in Article 8 related to the different agencies that were involved. There was a need for cooperation on this point, where all agencies were involved in the process. The transit coordinator of Article 11 was a success story, where they had encountered positive operation in countries where it had been implemented.

2.88. Their experience also showed that internal cooperation was the area where more work was needed. It was the case that either the existing laws or regulations were too stringent, or they were completely inexistent. It was important to look at the WCO SAFE framework, cooperation through private companies, customs authorities and other participating agencies. Also, experts faced the challenge of being trusted to handle these types of situations. In the case of perishable goods, often customs authorities did not have proper storage facilities and they were provided by private companies. In the delegate's point of view, the NTFC should be headed by customs authorities, since they were the agency who had the most experience in TF topics. If they were not leading the committee, it was important that they were at least at the forefront. The low levels of participation from the private sector and the discrimination they had seen be provided to different companies was an aspect to further consider.

2.89. The delegate of the Netherlands said the Netherlands favored an open, rules-based global trade and investment system. Open trade increased innovation, efficiency and competitiveness. Trade and investment were engines for economic growth and the creation of jobs. They should also be fair and sustainable. The Netherlands promoted mutual benefits for trade partners and themselves. They were strong supporters of trade facilitation and among the main supporters of AfT with programs that achieved results on the ground. They worked together with partners such as the WTO, the ITC, TMEA, the World Bank Group. An emphasis was placed on women's participation in international and regional trade. Improving women's economic opportunities and removing barriers through their participation in regional and international trade were essential for pursuing economic development and achieving fairer and beneficial outcomes for all. These were among the guiding principles of the Dutch policy of foreign trade and development cooperation.

2.90. Many female traders were at a disadvantage because of poor literacy and limited knowledge of cross-border regulations and procedures. Access to education, knowledge and skills were critical elements. Women traders had limited access to services, including financial services that enabled them to grow their businesses. They needed to be protected against sexual harassment and violence. They sought to strengthen the position of women in trade via, for example, the center for the promotion of imports to the EU, the ITC, TMEA and the Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA) program. This last program focused on women together with ECOWAS, UEMOA, World Bank Group, the European Commission, USAID, GIZ, and others. The Netherlands had financed the program that targeted small-scale women traders at border markets, and on major trade corridors in several ECOWAS member States as well as efforts to make policies and regulatory frameworks more responsive. Recognizing the important role of women in trade, the Trade Facilitation West Africa program would design measures to address specific gender-related constraints, including women's lack of knowledge in legal and regulatory frameworks that governed trade relations or women's lack of mobility—to be able to comply for example with the need to send documents to capital cities rather than introducing simplified procedures for small skills traders.

2.91. The program was also expected to address specific issues at border markets, for example the lack of toilet facilities and security. When women traders relied heavily on revenues from trade for their livelihoods, they experienced sexual harassment. Women needed to have access to legal and advisory services. Perpetuating abuse should be brought to justice. As the program had just started, there were no results to show yet, however the TFWA program generated assessments, small-scale trader surveys and political economy analysis that would help to define a gender strategy across three main result areas. The first was more efficient implementation of the ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme and common external tariff, and the WTO TFA. The second was to improve the efficiency of the movement of goods among six major trade corridors. Third was lobbying advocacy and specific measures to improve conditions for small scale traders and women in particular. They were also in the progress of commissioning an independent political analysis to monitor the impact of the TFWA program and other trade-related initiatives in West Africa on different groups of stakeholders. This political economic analysis was expected to guide positions making progress.

2.92. The delegate of Finland stated they were also an important contributor in TF initiatives. In addition to their contribution to the TFAF, Finland was funding several regional and multilateral trade development projects. Their support was mainly channeled through multilateral agencies that had the required expertise to deliver technical assistance in TFA. A recent three-year project had taken place in collaboration with the WCO titled 'To progress the Trade Facilitation agenda within the framework of the WCO Mercator Programme in the East and Southern Africa (ESA) Region, 2016 – 2019'. The project aimed at increasing African trade as well as trade between Africa and the rest of the world by supporting customs reform and modernising the beneficiary countries in Eastern and

Southern Africa. This aim was to help beneficiary countries to implement the TFA. The project had contributed to facilitating trade and improving procedures of ESA, customs administrations by introducing modern technologies using tools and instruments developed by the WCO. The project also sought to build sustainable regional training capacity for regional training centers. As another example, Finland also supported economic integration and enhanced trade by funding the TMEA, through a project in 2017-2020 totals EUR 9.8 million.

2.93. The delegate of the United Kingdom indicated Aid for Trade was a central pillar of the UK's approach to economic development. Their objective was to support developing countries to play an active role in the global trading system and to use trade as an instrument for growth, job creation and poverty alleviation. A key part of Aid for Trade support was dedicated to trade facilitation projects which helped developing countries to introduce reforms relevant to the implementation of the TFA. As well as bilateral and regional programmes, such as TMEA, which began its life as a DFID project, the UK had funded a capacity building programme to support the implementation of the TFA through the WCO Mercator programme and the UNCTAD empowerment programme for NTFCs. A recent positive example of the empowerment program had taken place in Namibia, where capacity building or NTFC had resulted in a trade facilitation roadmap for implementing TFA measures. During the workshop, the NTFC of Namibia had been formally launched with a mandate to lead their trade facilitation efforts. The UK had also provided funding for the support for the implementation of the TFA. The aim of the program was to help reduce trade costs and waiting times at the border, and in the long term to contribute to inclusive growth. The programme had been working with four main implementing partners—the World Bank Trade Facilitation Support programme, the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, the WTO TFAF and the SDTF. A good example of positive impacts on the road through this programme had taken place in Viet Nam, where the trade facilitation support program had helped launch the Viet Nam trade information portal. This portal enabled access to all cross-border trade regulation information in one place. Making the Viet Nam's regulatory requirements for import and export available to the private sector in an easily accessible transparent and searchable format was the key step to the simpler, faster and lower-cost business environment. The UK was committed to working with partners around the world to build on good progress that had already been made and to target the specific needs of the developing countries for trade facilitation.

2.94. The delegate of Nigeria commended the WCO Mercator program, which ensured results management and performance measures in terms of TFA delivery. He requested that the presentation be made available and enquired if WCO representatives were able to report on activities to the NTFCs. They had a representative of the WCO come in the past and present to their NTFC, and it would be beneficial to receive reports from activities in Geneva and Brussels. In addition, it was also important that while customs had a prominent role in implementation, other agencies were also involved. He thanked the various presentations from the EU and its member States. Awareness of the projects was very low, to the extent that benefits were less significant. Therefore, it would be beneficial to ensure that awareness level was high, with benefits accruable from those interventions. It was also important to involve stakeholders and recipients of aid in the development of projects, to ensure alliance with national priority. They would look forward to hearing more positive experiences. In this regard, he recalled that one of the presentations stated that benefits could not be measured yet and enquired how much time it would be required to do so.

2.95. The delegate of Canada was particularly struck by the presentation from Jamaica, as an example of positive experiences. This particular case could be interesting to other committees such as agriculture, TBT, SPS and Customs Valuation. He encouraged Jamaica and other presenters, as well as the Secretariat and the Chairs of the various Committees to raise awareness of these cases to disseminate information. He concluded by requesting to invite the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation to the next meeting.

2.96. It was so agreed.

2.97. The Committee took note of the statements made.

III. REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF ARTICLE 21:2 (ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR LDCS)

2.98. There were no comments made under this agenda item.

2.99. The dedicated session was adjourned.
