



**General Council
15 May 2020**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

HELD IN VIRTUAL FORMAT ON 15 MAY 2020

Chairperson: H.E. Dr. David Walker (New Zealand)

1 INFORMATION SHARING AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON COVID-19 TRADE-RELATED MEASURES¹

1.1. The Chairman² reiterated his deepest sympathies to the Governments and people of all WTO Members that were being severely affected by the spread of COVID-19 and the tragic loss of human lives it was causing. The global COVID-19 pandemic was first and foremost a human tragedy. But it was already becoming clear that the economic dimensions of the crisis threatened to compound the negative effects on livelihoods and health; and that trade, or the lack of it, could variously contribute to ameliorating problems or to aggravating the challenges – in both the immediate and longer term.

1.2. Over those past couple of months, the WTO had been active in seeking to help Members in responding to the crisis. The Director-General had participated in virtual meetings held by some Members – including the G20 – and, together with other International Organizations such as WHO, WCO, FAO and IMF, had issued guidance statements for Members to draw from in their domestic actions. The Secretariat had also sought to monitor and report on COVID-related trade measures being taken by Members.

1.3. Members, individually and in various groupings, had also been active in issuing statements of policy intention. They had called for keeping markets open; ensuring the free flow of trade in essential medical goods, as well as in agricultural and food products; minimizing disruptions in supply chains; and for measures taken in response of the crisis to be transparent, temporary and proportionate, without creating unnecessary barriers to trade. And some Members had begun to move beyond statements of intent to 'put some rubber on the road' in implementing trade-enhancing action – on either the import or export side and, in some cases, covering both.

1.4. The Special Virtual General Council Meeting was an important opportunity, as a General Council, for Members to share information and exchange views on COVID-19 and related trade measures taken to date, and on approaches they were looking to take to assist in responding to and recovering from the crisis in the coming weeks and months. With those words, he was looking forward to hearing Members' views that day within the time constraints of the virtual format. He intended to first give the floor to the Director-General. Thereafter, he would open the floor to delegations. As Members were aware, they were using a new platform for the meeting so in opening the floor he would first make a couple of practical points about how to use it. He recalled – as had also been indicated in the convening notice for the meeting – that no substantive decision would be taken by the General Council.

1.5. The Director-General³ noted that the platform that Members were using that day – Interprefy – responded to their request at the virtual HODs in April that the Secretariat should explore platforms

¹ The Airgram convening this meeting can be found in document WTO/AIR/GC/28.

² The Chairman's statement was subsequently circulated in document JOB/GC/228. His statement at the 17 April Informal HODs Meeting was circulated in document JOB/TNC/81.

³ The Director-General's statement was subsequently circulated in document JOB/GC/229. His statement at the 17 April Informal HODs Meeting was circulated in document JOB/TNC/80.

that were more secure and allowed for interpretation services. Some UN agencies were already using Interpretify, and the WTO intended to use it for further meetings like those. As of the current week, in line with the gradual relaxation of confinement measures by the Swiss authorities, the WTO had authorised 20% of its Secretariat Staff to return to the WTO premises on a voluntary basis. The protection of the health of both staff and delegates remained the first priority, and meetings at the WTO premises remained suspended at least through the end of the month. Access to the premises by delegates was restricted and he encouraged Members to send communications electronically, whenever possible, to minimize the amount of physical mail passing through the WTO premises. He was in regular contact with the Swiss authorities and would update Members of developments, including when meetings at the WTO premises could resume.

1.6. He said that he would also make his second report to the Membership on trade and the COVID-19 pandemic. His report at the informal HODs on 17 April had been circulated to delegations in JOB/TNC/80. Since that meeting, Members had started to witness in some regions a gradual easing of restrictions on business activity and physical interaction. Elsewhere, however, the storm was still raging. At the last meeting, he had highlighted the forecasts of a steep decline in trade in 2020 across all regions and sectors. The impact of the deep ongoing shocks to supply and demand was becoming more and more visible. People continued to lose jobs and incomes. Livelihoods had been severely impacted.

1.7. International cooperation, including on trade, would help economies lift each other out of the crisis. That had been his message to the virtual meeting of the UN Chief Executives Board on 14 May, where he had said that fiscal, monetary, and trade policies should pull hard – and pull in the same direction – to lay the foundation for a strong and inclusive recovery. Also on 14 May, G20 trade ministers had met virtually and had expressed support for strengthening open and resilient supply chains, particularly for medical supplies. A few weeks ago, he had urged a virtual meeting of G20 Agriculture Ministers to act collectively to ensure that their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic did not unintentionally create food shortages. Ministers had committed to cooperating closely and taking concrete actions to safeguard global food security and nutrition and he had welcomed that commitment.

1.8. Since the April HODs, various Members and groups had sent similar messages in declarations, statements and proposals. Those had been circulated and posted on the WTO's COVID-19 webpage. While he very much commended those efforts, which were precisely the trade policy response Members needed, they would only work if growing numbers of Members acted on them. The WTO had continued to work closely with other International Organizations to encourage an effective policy response to the COVID-19 crisis, resulting in joint statements with the WHO and the IMF. Those statements were all available on the website.

1.9. The WTO had continued its efforts to track COVID-19 related trade measures as part of the organization's longstanding monitoring and transparency mandate. Members deserved credit for their cooperation in sharing information with the Secretariat, including through the notification process to the relevant WTO Committees. He urged those that had not yet responded to do so. The exercise had compiled 231 COVID-19-related trade measures for goods, across 87 WTO Members and Observers. 53% of those measures were trade facilitating, and that was good, while the remaining 47% could be considered as having trade-restrictive effects. As of 14 May, the exercise had compiled 89 measures from 43 Members affecting trade in services, most of them trade-facilitating. Around two-thirds of COVID-19 related notifications related to standards and regulations under TBT and SPS. Those mainly affected trade in personal protective gear, food, live animals and medical equipment. Around half of those measures were reported as temporary.

1.10. Members and other stakeholders had issued statements and other public pronouncements stressing that open and predictable trade in agriculture and food products was crucially important to prevent the pandemic from also becoming a food crisis. In that context, he was informed that the Chair of the Committee on Agriculture was consulting on requests by some Members to consider convening a special meeting to focus on COVID-19 and agriculture trade policy in mid-June. Finally, the Secretariat Task Force that had been set up to monitor how the pandemic was affecting international trade had continued its analytical work, including through informal information notes under the Secretariat's own responsibility and which did not prejudice Members' positions, rights or obligations under the WTO.

1.11. While a number of governments had put in place measures to assist businesses and workers to weather the economic storm of the pandemic – what was evident was that businesses, in particular micro, small and medium ones were hardest hit. That was why the ICC and B20 had approached the WTO to partner in a virtual trade dialogue on 19 May. Business representatives would highlight the challenges they were facing and discuss some of the policy responses they would like governments to take to assist them.

1.12. He then stressed three points. First, restarting the global economy and reinstating confidence for businesses and households would depend not only on when the health crisis would be contained, but on coordinated, coherent and cooperative international economic policy responses. As he had said in April, fiscal, monetary and trade policies should continue to pull in the same direction. Second, while WTO rules were clear about Members' rights and obligations in that regard, and the WTO was not characterising anyone's measures as violating any of the WTO rules or extrapolating Members' rights, governments should work to ensure that their emergency interventions did not unnecessarily restrict trade and investment. By ensuring that measures were transparent, targeted, risk-proportionate, WTO-compliant, and temporary, Members could help prevent supply shortages and price volatility. Third, he called upon all Members to resist policies that could further disrupt supply chains and add to the strains on an already fragile global economy. To build more resilient national economies, Members should build more resilient international cooperation – and a more resilient and effective multilateral trading system. He urged all Members to stand together and uphold the role of open, predictable and rules-based trade as a fundamental driver for recovery from the current crisis.

1.13. The Chairman then provided some practical pointers for the conduct of the meeting in virtual format. He also reminded Members to keep their statements to a maximum of five minutes. Longer versions could be sent to the Secretariat to be included in the written record of the meeting.

1.14. The representative of Uruguay said that COVID-19 had created an unprecedented situation. Although people had already faced similar viruses in the past, they were currently seeing progress on technology and science and measures taken by modern States that had helped them to take a number of coordinated measures that in the past would have been impossible. Governments had taken measures to prevent contagion and contain the pandemic which had had the effects on the economy and on trade in particular. While those measures had met their goal of containing the spread of the virus, had saved lives and had protected healthcare systems, they nevertheless had had a serious impact on the economy and the livelihoods of so many people and families.

1.15. In that context and as the Director-General had just pointed out, one of the most affected sectors had been MSMEs. That was why Canada, Mexico and Uruguay together with 74 Members had put forward a statement on MSMEs with a view to ensuring that MSMEs received the political and material support that they required to overcome the crisis. From the MSMEs initiative, they would try to find solutions and share good practices in order to facilitate trade, accelerate efforts towards trade digitalization including access to digital tools as well as improve MSMEs' access to trade finance and to trade-related information through online platforms.

1.16. They reaffirmed their intention to work together in order to ensure free, fair, predictable and stable trade to keep markets open with the view to supporting the global economic recovery. The statement was available in WT/GC/215 dated 14 May 2020. They welcomed the recent decision of Viet Nam to support the statement and encouraged all interested delegations to co-sponsor the statement and to do so before 19 May⁴.

1.17. On trade-related measures and overall analysis of the information received by the WTO, he said that more than a hundred Members had taken about 200 trade measures and most of them were designed to liberalise imports of medical supplies and other equipment to contain the pandemic. But in a similar proportion, those measures had also been designed to prevent the prohibition and restriction of exports of those same products. In some cases, there had been authorizations of the expropriation of equipment by the State. That would have been impossible at the beginning of the year.

1.18. Those types of measures had led to a scarcity for certain supplies which had in turn affected least-developed countries including their protective capacity. Since the production of those supplies

⁴ A revision of this document was subsequently circulated in document WT/GC/215/Rev.1 adding Iceland, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Viet Nam as co-sponsors to the Statement.

was highly concentrated in certain places, those types of measure which were understandable during a crisis could at the same time have a negative effect in the medium term because they created incentives to stop reorienting the production towards those supplies.

1.19. Uruguay was attached to free trade and had adopted a Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System and the Joint Statement on Open, Predictable Trade in Agricultural and Food Products. Like other similar statements, those had been focusing on calling on Members to minimize that type of restrictive measure and, if they adopted such measures, to guarantee that those measures were transparent, proportionate, temporary and WTO-consistent. In that regard, Uruguay had just taken one trade measure – preventing the application of tariffs for personal protective equipment and pharmaceutical products in order to facilitate their import.

1.20. The representative of Switzerland wished to highlight the main features of the Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System supported by 43 WTO Members and issued as a General Council document in WT/GC/212⁵. In the statement, Ministers stressed that the WTO had an essential role to play in ensuring the continued cross-border flow of vital medical supplies and other essential goods and services during the health crisis. They pledged to lift as soon as possible any trade restrictive emergency measures imposed in response to the health crisis. They underscored the importance of maintaining well-functioning supply chains in order to deploy international resources more effectively. They encouraged work at the WTO on concrete actions aimed at facilitating cross-border flows of vital medical supplies and other essential goods and services.

1.21. Furthermore, they pledged not to impose export restrictions and to refrain from implementing unjustified trade barriers on agricultural and food products in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They supported the vital role of the WTO in monitoring trade-related measures implemented in connection with the COVID-19 situation. Ministers recognized the enormous challenges faced by developing Members and, in particular, least-developed Members as well as MSMEs. They supported the full resumption of all WTO activities as soon as feasible and agreed to develop new WTO disciplines, to improve existing disciplines and to find a lasting solution to the situation relating to the WTO Appellate Body. Finally, they stressed that an open global trading system would be essential for sustainable economic recovery.

1.22. On behalf of Switzerland, he noted that returning to normal levels of activity in all areas was crucial. Members should find ways to efficiently use the time that would elapse before they could hold face-to-face meetings with participation from capitals. A combination of pragmatic approaches should allow the WTO to advance its work. For instance, hybrid solutions with physical participation of Geneva-based delegates and remote participation of experts from capitals should provide for sufficient inclusiveness and transparency to allow full resumption of work. Fisheries subsidies remained the highest priority and special efforts should be undertaken to finalise those negotiations by the end of the year.

1.23. Transparency of restrictive trade measures, including those taken in health emergencies, was a key factor for economic agents. It was unfortunate that the completeness and timeliness of notifications to the WTO fell far short of expectations. Significant progress should be made in that area. In a world where confinement measures were widespread, e-commerce had helped maintain a substantial level of activity in many sectors. If there was a lesson to be learned from the crisis, it was the need to harvest the full potential of trade digitalization – notably by extending the customs moratorium on electronic transmissions and completing the JSI negotiations on e-commerce.

1.24. He stressed that viruses acknowledged no borders. The response to the pandemic should therefore be coordinated and global. As beggar-thy-neighbour policies were a recipe for disaster, Members should harness international trade to address shortages and diversify supply sources. The WTO had a central role to play in reducing obstacles to trade in medical supplies, including export restrictions, tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The WTO should also resolutely address export restrictions on agriculture and agri-food products, which could have a disastrous effect on importing countries. Cooperation within the WTO was likewise important to restore confidence among the international community and to support a resilient and sustainable economic recovery in line with the SDGs.

⁵ A revision of this Ministerial Statement was circulated in document WT/GC/212/Rev.1 adding Mauritania, Papua New Guinea, Qatar and Seychelles as co-sponsors.

1.25. The representative of Morocco noted that Members were all facing an unprecedented global health crisis – a crisis that reminded them of how closely their destinies were linked and how dependent they were on each other since the beginning of the outbreak. The pandemic, carrying humanitarian, social and economic challenges, could only be resolved through large-scale, multilateral and multidimensional responses. Studies showed that Members would be confronted with a dramatic drop in economic growth on a global scale. Some were calling for a new approach in defining the priorities for international trade which was facing a huge impact for the relocation of industries and climate change. It was therefore essential for Members to support, without detour, the leadership and central role of the WTO in the management of the commercial and economic side of the pandemic during these troubling times.

1.26. Protectionism and restrictive trade measures hindered the development of international trade and negatively impacted the security and prosperity of nations. Developing and LDC Members were suffering from the steep fall in commodity prices which was pushing down their incomes and causing great pressure on their budgets. Financial measures should therefore be taken by the international financial authorities and the big powers for the alignment of debt and the facilitation of access to credits at acceptable rates to make up for the budget deficit. International cooperation should therefore facilitate fair and equitable trade in health products including medicine, vaccines and medical equipment which were currently in dire need around the world.

1.27. Morocco was experiencing a great mobilization in the fight against COVID-19 as had been illustrated by the creation of the national solidarity COVID-19 Special Fund and by numerous appropriate measures, decided by a Government Watch Committee made up of all concerned Departments. For instance, in its national action, under the leadership of His Majesty The King Mohammed the VI, the response provided by the Kingdom of Morocco was multifaceted in the image of the multidimensional nature of the crisis and its impacts. It concerned more than 300 measures, and based on five principles: solidarity, anticipation, prevention, a holistic approach and prioritising citizens – especially the most vulnerable. That action was characterised above all by improving the health system, mitigating the socio-economic impact, channelling domestic financial resources to the COVID-19 Special Fund and mobilising national industry to produce protective equipment for individuals like masks and artificial respirators. Also, the different driving forces of civil society had contributed in different forms notably through analysis and reflection to mitigate the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and to envisage the future in the short and medium term.

1.28. The expression of the attachment of Morocco to multilateralism was also materialised by the support for the plans and initiatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations as well as other initiatives to which Morocco was actively contributing such as the Initiative of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 which included thirteen countries from four continents, the Joint Declaration of the Alliance for Multilateralism and the "Support Group for Global Infectious Disease Response" recently launched by a core group of States, among others. Morocco requested that the WTO cooperate with other international organizations in particular UNCTAD, WHO and ICC in order to combine their efforts in the face of the global crisis.

1.29. Based on its African roots, Morocco, under the auspices of His Majesty The King Mohammed the VI, had launched an initiative aimed at creating an operational framework to work with African countries in the fight against the pandemic. It was a pragmatic and action-oriented initiative dedicated to sharing experiences and best practices to deal with the health, economic and social impact of the pandemic. Morocco was already making considerable efforts in that direction by channelling support and material aid to brothers and friends of the continent. At the same time, Members had to resume work as soon as possible keeping in mind that they had to resolve fundamental issues like those related to the fisheries negotiations, the Appellate Body and the tenure and the agenda of MC12. Finally, Morocco thanked the WTO Secretariat and welcomed its important and active role since the outbreak of the crisis by issuing reports and useful information for Members.

1.30. The representative of Jamaica, on behalf of the ACP Group, said that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACP Group had undertaken an extensive assessment of its impact on its members. Some of the main conclusions were, among others, that the negative impact of the pandemic would be significant for their economies and trade, that some of the trade restrictive measures appeared disproportionate to the concerns which were being addressed and that developing countries and LDCs would require additional policy space to address any fallout resulting from COVID-19. Concerning TRIPS and Public Health, COVID-19 represented an unprecedented health challenge to all Members. For the most vulnerable – the developing and LDC Members which

had weaker health systems, access to affordable medicine, vaccines, diagnostics and medical equipment as well as access to technologies to produce them were indispensable to the fight against the pandemic.

1.31. In order to better facilitate access, any COVID-19 invention or other technologies should be temporarily treated as global public goods so that they could be manufactured and distributed in the required quantity but in line with acceptable standards by multiple producers including those in developing countries and LDCs. The Agreement should continue to be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of WTO Members' right to protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all. The WTO had a vital and ethical role to play in striking an acceptable balance between, on the one hand, preserving the health of their populations and on the other, saving the lives of their people, when looking at the commercial aspects of intellectual property rights – as an unhealthy population could neither engage in nor facilitate trade.

1.32. The ACP Group expressed concerns over the use of export restrictions on medical supplies as policy responses to the pandemic. That aggravated the impact of the pandemic especially in ACP Group members given their limited capacity in health care delivery and infrastructure. Their members had fallen victim to that practice. The ACP therefore called on WTO Members to refrain from that destabilising approach. The ACP Group also anticipated a decline in agricultural production and trade resulting from, inter alia, mandatory quarantine, social distancing rules, export restrictions, and disruption in global logistical arrangements. That would adversely affect the ACP Group's agricultural trade, food security and livelihood.

1.33. Within that context, the ACP Group welcomed the relaxation of certain restrictions by Members and was at the same time concerned over the adoption of export restrictions, large stimulus packages and other measures that could aggravate the impact of the pandemic by incentivising imbalances in global agricultural trade. The ACP Group acknowledged that Members would have to adopt certain measures to deal with an unprecedented development but they also had a duty in the WTO to ensure that their measures were compatible with the flexibilities in WTO rules, that they did not prejudice the interest of developing and LDC Members, and were not disguised restrictions on agricultural international trade. Members should not squander the unique opportunity to simultaneously advance the work of the CoA SS, especially as it related to trade distorting domestic support, PSH and SSM.

1.34. The Services sector had been the most significantly impacted economic area for many ACP Group members with the introduction of mandatory quarantine policies and border closures. Evidence of the fallout was being reflected in, inter alia, increased unemployment, reduction in tourism activities and reduced foreign exchange earnings such as remittance transfers. The extent of the impact was still not known. In that connection, while the ACP commended the WTO Secretariat on reporting on services-related measures taken by Members in the name of COVID-19, it would be important for the Secretariat to preserve Members' rights and obligations. The ACP also implored Members to exercise due restraint when adopting measures that could negatively impact the services trade of developing countries and LDCs.

1.35. The current situation had likewise brought electronic commerce to the fore, given the seemingly positive impact that those had as individuals, businesses and governments had been forced to adapt to working via web-conferencing and telecommuting. However, what had not been given enough credence, were the huge disparities in the digital divide. The ACP reiterated the urgent need for discussions on the development dimension under the E-Commerce Work Programme. The ACP Group also reiterated that the COVID-19 pandemic should not be a pretext for Members to take trade restrictive measures that were likely to lead to trade and supply chain disruptions. The Group could also not support an attempt to use the pandemic to create permanent rules when Members were responding to a temporary situation. The ACP was concerned as well by the decline in the supply of trade finance. Adequate trade finance was important to ensure that imports of food and essential medical equipment reached the economies where they were most needed. Fisheries subsidies remained an important deliverable and required Members' collective action to ensure that Members would deliver on the Ministerial Decision of MC11 and SDG 14.6.

1.36. The pandemic had also brought to the fore inequalities among and within countries. That highlighted why S&DT for developing and LDC Members was such an integral part of the architecture of the multilateral trading system and the importance of many of the issues contained in the G90 proposals. The ACP Group called on WTO Members to earnestly look at those proposals in light of

COVID-19. The ACP was concerned about the opportunistic narrative that questioned the relevance of the WTO. The Group continued to be committed to maintaining a rules-based, transparent, predictable, inclusive and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system with the WTO as its core institution and remained committed to a WTO that facilitated trade for all, especially the most vulnerable among them to ensure that no Member was left behind.

1.37. The representative of Guyana associated with the statements made by the ACP Group and to be made by CARICOM. Guyana joined the solidarity and goodwill of all Members to work in a coordinated and cooperative manner to overcome the pandemic and enable the recovery of their economies as quickly and safely as possible. In the face of COVID-19, the Guyana Government had taken early action to activate its national health system's response. With the critical systems of their regional and international partners, particularly WHO, Guyana had managed to maintain a reasonably stable health sector and situation in the country.

1.38. With increased testing, Guyana had to date recorded 113 confirmed cases with 41 recoveries and 10 deaths. Needless to say, the situation remained a delicate one and Guyana continued to be concerned about the global impact being experienced. On the economic and trade front, almost all of Guyana's economic sectors had suffered the impact of COVID-19. Guyana was collaborating with its regional partners in the Caribbean Community to implement a comprehensive and coordinated strategy for relaunching economic activity and promoting economic recovery. At all levels, Guyana would need the continued and sustained support of its international development partners.

1.39. In the WTO, Guyana fully accepted that Members were in a critical period of reflection and recalibration especially in the context of trade relations, trade structures and trade rules. While Guyana was an important food and agriculture producer in the context of the Caribbean, it was still reliant on imported inputs. 70% of its imports were classified as intermediate inputs and thus keeping trade flowing was essential to its economy's performance. Guyana was also export dependent economy. While it was an agricultural exporter and an emerging oil exporter, its reality was that gold alone currently accounted for 50% of its export earnings.

1.40. The negative impacts had been considerable. Air cargo had reduced by approximately 30% and fuel consumption was down about 40%. Guyana's tourism industry had already experienced a revenue loss of greater than 150 million USD and had experienced 30% job loss. The significant plummet of oil prices had caused a substantial reduction in its anticipated revenues. The reduction in capped investment being experienced affected all aspects of its economy. As small States and small islands battled COVID-19, they also continued to face the challenges that they normally confronted – the natural resource shocks and the economic shocks being among the most important.

1.41. The work of the WTO was essential to Guyana's economic recovery and economic development. For that reason, Guyana emphasised its commitment to the global multilateral system in general and to the global rules-based trading system specifically. Guyana also underlined the importance of collectively working harder inside the WTO towards establishing a fairer global trading system – one that promoted the development of all its Members. As the UN Secretary-General had said recently, "Let us use the COVID crisis as a watershed moment to build back better, to build a fairer, greener, more sustainable and more inclusive world."

1.42. The representative of Saint Lucia, on behalf of CARICOM, associated with the statement made by the ACP Group. CARICOM expressed solidarity with all WTO Members, none of which had been spared by the impacts of the pandemic. The Caribbean Public Health Agency had upgraded the risk of further disease transmission to the Caribbean Region to Very High in March 2020. As of 6 May, there had been 14,184 confirmed cases in the Caribbean and 603 reported deaths. While the virus itself was a public health pandemic, its impact had extended to just about every facet of life across CARICOM, further exposing the acute vulnerabilities already facing the region.

1.43. As was the case with all Members, the COVID-19 health crisis was having a profoundly damaging impact on the economic stability of the CARICOM region. Complicating the region's policy response were a host of constraints such as a fragile macroeconomic climate and high levels of external debt, much of which had been contracted in response to natural disasters. The ongoing shock was expected to worsen the fiscal accounts due to a steep decline in revenues and reduced tax receipts. Nevertheless, there was recognition that a large fiscal effort was needed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and to support vulnerable populations, households and businesses.

1.44. CARICOM Member States were among the most vulnerable to external shocks being particularly susceptible to natural disasters and external economic shocks. Hence, the economic prospects of the region were tied to the fortunes of others. One of the main shock transmission channels had been the tourism sector which was a primary driver of economic activities and a key source of foreign exchange earnings. The sector depended heavily on demand from key markets such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union. The pandemic was also laying bare the region's vulnerabilities with respect to food and nutrition security. Notwithstanding CARICOM's food production potential, it was a net food importing region with over 70% of all food consumed originating outside the region. Hence, the availability and accessibility of food to CARICOM's populace was also fundamental to mitigating the adverse health and economic impact of the pandemic.

1.45. While the food supply in CARICOM was currently stable, CARICOM feared that the extended period of the pandemic would increasingly place global food supply chains under pressure and by extension, reduce supplies or raise prices of those key products. To that end, one of the short-term areas of focus of CARICOM was to maintain the integrity of global and regional food supply chains. Therefore, CARICOM Member States were drawing up national food security plans and engaging the private sector to shore up food supplies. Critical to that effort was the bolstering of intra-regional transportation and trade facilitation. The crisis had also revealed the importance of providing public support in building resilience and satisfying the long-term food security needs of small vulnerable economies.

1.46. The CARICOM Group urged restraint as it related to the imposition of export restrictions by WTO Members. The Caribbean Community was particularly concerned about the use of such measures on medical supplies and personal protective equipment necessary for combating the virus as well as on basic food products vital to the health and wellbeing of their populations. CARICOM had noted with alarm that some key medical supplies needed to fight the pandemic were currently only available on very short-term contracts and that contract prices were subject to significant fluctuations. CARICOM therefore reiterated its call on Members to help reduce the level of uncertainty that already surrounded the pandemic by refraining from imposing export restrictions – particularly as they related to items necessary for combating the virus, and food products vital to the health and wellbeing of other Members. Such measures would only result in price hikes and encourage excessive speculation in international markets.

1.47. Further, CARICOM's Ministerial Council for Trade and Economic Development, meeting on 6 May, had voiced concern over the use of export restrictions at that time, noting that it would only exacerbate the situation and make it more difficult to fight the pandemic. In that respect, CARICOM was in solidarity with the Submission by the LDC Group circulated in document WT/GC/211 dated 4 May 2020 which had called upon Members to refrain from imposing export restrictions on key medical supplies and basic food products during that and future health emergencies. As small vulnerable economies, CARICOM shared similar perspectives.

1.48. CARICOM recognized that, although the work of the WTO had been severely hampered as a result of the pandemic, the role of the organization was currently more indispensable than ever in ensuring that Members' inter-connected world responded to the crisis, through trade and trade related measures, that secured the health and economic interests of all. Members' ability to participate in meetings, virtual or otherwise, and especially any kind of negotiations, decision-making or not, would be severely hampered given the challenges of COVID-19 in their capitals, as key decision makers increasingly focused on the economic downturn as well as communication technology weaknesses.

1.49. The representative of Israel said that it was still too early to fully understand the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. All Members were grappling with the terrible loss of so many human lives, the economic and commercial effects of the pandemic and the uncertainty of what the future could bring. Israel in that sense was no exception. Before the pandemic, Israel had been in full employment whereas, by the end of April, around 15% of Israeli labour force was unemployed. According to recent forecast, Israel was expecting a negative GDP growth rate of around 5% after a strong increase in growth averaging 3.5% in recent years.

1.50. The WTO should play an important role in addressing such major challenges as that was the forum to ensure the application of international trade rules for the functioning of supply chains which for Israel was a major concern. As it was committed to the international collaboration in the

multilateral trading system, Israel had co-sponsored along with more than forty other Members the Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System. The statement highlighted some of the key elements Members should be tackling in the near future without prejudice to discussing ongoing work as well as any other areas Members could consider necessary.

1.51. The worldwide use of virtual platforms had been growing rapidly during the pandemic and it was only natural that the WTO would use that tool as well if they wanted to remain relevant. Israel appreciated the submission of its Latin American colleagues which provided some useful ideas in that regard. As had been mentioned in the submission, the normal work of the WTO Committees and other WTO Bodies should gradually resume and the priority should be given to discussions that were focused on measures taken in response to the pandemic. However, taking into consideration the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, more time should be provided to the Members for confirming meetings, circulating documents, preparing statements, submission of notification, among others, in order to allow delegations to better prepare despite their constraints.

1.52. Israel also drew attention to transparency and mentioned the initiative by the Secretariat to launch a useful portal combining all relevant information and notifications. Israel assumed that such information had an impact on the decision-making of all or most Members. Concerning e-commerce, not only was Israel a key-innovator in that front, it had also been an active participant in the e-commerce initiative since its inception. The current situation had brought the spotlight to e-commerce and the necessity for updated rules as e-commerce had become a lifeline for many companies during the physical shutdown of businesses around the world. Israel looked forward to the resumption of the negotiations in the near future.

1.53. Convening the Ministerial Conference especially in the current circumstances would be very important. Israel however understood that at that point in time, it was difficult to set up a date. Nevertheless, Israel stood ready to work on all issues and contribute to the discussions in the WTO Committees and Bodies aimed to making recommendations to be upheld by the General Council. Israel also thanked the Director-General for his service during a challenging period at the WTO. Although he would be leaving soon, Israel was hoping for a smooth, transparent and inclusive transition. Israel stood ready to make its contribution as Members collectively moved ahead.

1.54. The representative of Botswana, on behalf of the African Group, hoped Members could give special focus to the impact of COVID-19 on smaller and more vulnerable economies in Africa, particularly the LDCs. The COVID-19 outbreak had reached the African continent later than the rest of the world but had spread quickly and now 53 out of the 54 African countries had been affected. As per WHO AFRO statistics on 11 May, a cumulative total of 63,015 cases had been confirmed, with 2,283 deaths reported. The African Group stressed the importance of giving due consideration to the disparate impact of the pandemic on developing countries, especially NFIDCs and LDCs. An urgent and coordinated response should focus on how to scale up their health systems, and ensure access to medical supplies and essential food products, as well as overcoming the huge income losses that were already evident.

1.55. African Governments were working hard to secure health and human life, contain the spread of the outbreak, and provide support to the majority of their people who were vulnerable and less resourced, as well as to support their economies. That said, their institutions and systems on all fronts – health, social and economic – were overstretched. Global rulemaking in a time of crisis was very difficult to pursue, therefore the members of the African Group needed time to assess the implications of the crisis. For that, African countries had taken certain decisions to meet their domestic demand for some essential goods, including medical supplies and some agricultural products. Despite the fundamental difficulties, Members were doing their best to notify such measures to the WTO, and continuously reviewing those measures as the pandemic developed.

1.56. The African Group noted the importance of transparency, especially under the current circumstances, and that authoritative notification by Members themselves was what would promote access to reliable information on measures, taking into account the capacity constraints of Members. Furthermore, it was important to highlight that pre-COVID-19 Africa had already been faced with a debt crisis. Debt relief was therefore essential to free up fiscal space for African countries to effectively finance the fight against COVID-19. In addition, members of the Group had recently requested financial assistance from the IMF in order to curb the economic and financial impact of the pandemic.

1.57. In that connection, there was opportunity to strengthen international investment flows to developing countries and LDCs and enable industrial diversification as well as integration in global and regional value chains. For the way forward, Members needed in the short-term to safeguard domestic market needs and keep supply chains flowing and connected in order to secure the essential needs and food security of other countries. In the long-term, the reform of the WTO rules should allow developing and LDC Members to adopt trade policies that would enable them to industrialise and diversify their economies in order to be resilient to that and other external shocks.

1.58. The WTO could spur global cooperation on a number of fronts including on helping to ensure that the COVID-19 treatment was accessible and affordable to the world as a public good. The TRIPS Agreement, including its flexibilities, could contribute to that objective. The use of appropriate trade policy tools could also ensure that patents and other intellectual property did not create avoidable barriers to facilitate the local manufacturing or import of essential medical supplies, devices, or technologies, including diagnostics, medicines, and vaccines. The strengthening of S&DT provisions could promote inclusive growth and ensure a development-oriented multilateral trading system. The WTO could also make progress on the implementation of the 1998 Work Programme on E-commerce that addressed the developmental aspects of e-commerce. While COVID-19 had highlighted the importance of digital transformation, it had more importantly brought to light the implications of the digital divide both within and between countries, particularly infrastructural gaps to enable e-commerce in Africa, and how to develop it.

1.59. In that regard, and as Members continued to assess the impact of COVID-19 on their health sectors and economies, the African Group considered it appropriate that Members used the opportunity to explore the trade tools at their disposal, to lay the foundations for a strong economic recovery and a sustainable, balanced, and inclusive growth with emphasis on building a more resilient trading system. The African Group underscored the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the development of a continental integration agenda that aimed to promote industrialization and economic diversification, that would usher in structural transformation in Africa. In view of the fact that the new realities presented by COVID-19 would have a significant impact on their economies and their ability to recover from the crisis, the African Group intended to submit a paper on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the multilateral negotiations.

1.60. The representative of Montenegro hoped that Members would soon be able to resume normal work. Normal work did not simply mean being in the same room together but also caring about the most important matters on trade-related issues. Montenegro was witnessing various trade restrictions imposed by many Members to protect the health and lives of their citizens – with some imposing trade restrictions on medical supplies and food. Given the current situation, Montenegro wondered how the distribution of vaccines or drugs to treat COVID-19 would work once they were available. The WTO had the responsibility to be the first one to raise its voice against the unjustified prohibition of trade flows and to stress the need for greater multilateral cooperation including the need to improve the multilateral trading system.

1.61. Although Montenegro had been one of the countries in Europe that had been worst hit by COVID-19, it was already currently very close to being a COVID-19-free country. Montenegro had not come across any new cases in the last ten days and only six people were in hospital care undergoing the recovery phase. Montenegro hoped to be in the COVID-19-free state in the coming days. Thanks to decisive and timely measures based solely on the requirements and recommendations of the medical profession, the healthcare system in Montenegro had been preserved. Montenegro submitted a notification of its trade measures for the period of October 2019 to May 2020. Among other things, Montenegro had informed Members about the measures and recommendations that it had introduced to prevent and combat COVID-19. Montenegro had already started to gradually ease the measures that had been introduced to keep citizens safe. Recognizing the importance of trade, Montenegro had not introduced any trade restrictive measure during that period and had kept its borders and ports open for the transit of goods.

1.62. Recognizing the role that the rules-based multilateral trading system should play in responding to the global health crisis, Montenegro supported the draft Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System. The initiative aimed to ensure continuous cross-border flow of medical supplies and other essential goods and services. Montenegro also supported the proposed statement indicating the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on citizens and businesses especially MSMEs and commended actions taken by many Members to address the current challenges faced by both workers and enterprises especially MSMEs.

1.63. In the regional context of trade measures and given the pandemic, the CEFTA Parties were focused on harmonizing measures to facilitate the transport and trade in basic products. The activities were related to the establishment of the so-called "Green Priority Corridors" where the free flow of necessary goods should be granted and the exchange of information on consignments as well as the provision of notifications on some SPS and Veterinary Inspections. The Parties had adopted a joint list of priority goods to be treated as such when conducting border controls. In order to establish "Green Priority Corridors", Montenegro acted according to the list and in that sense, there were no restrictions imposed on imports from countries that were not CEFTA Parties. The significant role of e-commerce especially in those difficult times should likewise be highlighted and Members should encourage the provision of expanded services in all aspects of trade.

1.64. The representative of New Zealand said that every Member had already experienced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including for most the tragic loss of human life. New Zealand's thoughts were with all of those dealing with the impacts of the pandemic, including the loss of friends and loved ones. Unfortunately, the pandemic had also exposed gaps and deficiencies in Members' own systems. Shortages of vital medical equipment and supplies had exacerbated the effects of the pandemic in many countries. Global markets, supply chains, and labour markets were experiencing severe disruption which undermined their economic stability. There were also growing concerns about the possible impact on food security in many countries.

1.65. All Members had been forced to take actions to protect the health of their populations. While the pandemic required robust and dynamic responses, New Zealand reminded Members that trade related measures should be implemented in a manner consistent with WTO rules. They should be necessary, targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains. The unfortunate reality which confronted Members however was that it was difficult to see how some of the measures taken met those standards. New Zealand was grateful to the Director-General and the Secretariat for commencing a process to track those measures. That transparency should continue and be intensified – as it provided a foundation for discussions such as the current one, and New Zealand hoped more discussions would subsequently transpire in specialised bodies and committees to inform Members' policy approaches.

1.66. New Zealand was particularly concerned with measures affecting medical product supply chains and food security, whether the measures were through export restrictions, increased tariffs or behind the border measures. New Zealand urged Members to move to adapt their regulatory compliance measures to electronic formats wherever possible, and to ensure their approaches were risk-based taking into account the added difficulty of conducting in-person checks and paper-based compliance while maintaining social distancing. Members should not lose sight of the importance of helping their economies out in a way that was minimally distortive of production and trade. This was particularly important in the agriculture sector, where the overlapping application of distortive border measures, non-transparent stockpiling, and new subsidies could, if unchecked, result in serious volatility and disruption affecting the global food system and particularly the poorest producers and consumers. Where such measures were being put in place, Members deserved the same level of transparency about them as for other trade measures – and New Zealand encouraged their prompt notification to the Secretariat through the existing mechanism.

1.67. It was critical that COVID-19 trade-related policies were designed and applied in a way that promoted rather than inhibited economic recovery, and which were trade facilitating rather than protectionist in intent. New Zealand had joined other Members in addressing those issues through several important new initiatives including most recently with Australia, Canada, Singapore and the Republic of Korea through which they would work together on action plans for the movement of both essential goods and essential workers. Those joint statements and other initiatives which supported the rules-based system were critically important and New Zealand was pleased to be part of them.

1.68. But to have more than symbolic value, they needed to involve more than words. For example, as part of the New Zealand/Singapore Declaration on Trade in Essential Goods for Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic⁶, New Zealand and Singapore had eliminated MFN applied tariffs on a range of medical and health products, while also undertaking not to impose export restrictions, and to work pro-actively to facilitate their movement across borders and resolve NTBs where they arose. The door was open for all Members wanting to effect meaningful change to join them. New Zealand was also actively considering how to ensure that there were no unnecessary barriers in place for services

⁶ This declaration can be found in document G/C/W/777.

that were essential to the COVID-19 response – not just for the sake of the future of the global economy and the multilateral trading system, but also at the most basic level for the fundamental welfare of people in all countries. Members needed to walk the talk. In times of international crises, Members needed more international cooperation and action, not less.

1.69. The representative of Argentina, also on behalf of Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay said that Members had a collective responsibility to continue their work in Geneva, adjusting it to the context of the pandemic. In that regard, a group of Latin American Countries had circulated an unofficial room document in RD/GC/13 – RD/TNC/2 which contained suggestions for actions and procedures to be considered during the confinement and after the reopening of the WTO Headquarters. They were pleased to see that some of the ideas expressed were already being implemented, such as the current special virtual meeting and the consultations conducted by various Chairs of regular bodies in that regard.

1.70. The room document contained suggestions with the aim of continuing WTO work during and after the pandemic. They included a set of logistical and health considerations to be taken into consideration once face-to-face meetings could resume at the headquarters of the organization. The room document complemented the efforts made at the domestic level in order to generate a mutual and necessary complement between the national and multilateral levels. They hoped to have the opportunity to discuss their suggestions and exchange ideas about it with the other delegations.

1.71. On behalf of Argentina, he said that the multilateral trading system had a substantial role to play in confronting COVID-19. Now, more than ever, Members needed rapid and joint international action against the pandemic since global problems required global solutions. As President Fernández had expressed at the recent G20 Leaders' Summit: "Overcoming the crisis ... requires us to design and sign a great Global Solidarity Pact. Nothing will be the same after this tragedy. We have to act together, right now, because it has been seen that no one can save oneself alone...". As a way to contribute during the difficult period, Argentina continued to provide quality food to the world. Its national industry in particular the agro-food sector was rapidly adapting to that new reality by complying with strict health protocols and supporting the continuous operation of logistics networks.

1.72. It was essential to ensure the flow of goods and services across borders including through trade facilitation and customs procedures. Restoring global supply chains where disruptions existed, particularly for essential medical supplies related to the pandemic was an urgent task. In that framework, emergency trade measures related to COVID-19 should be targeted, proportional, temporary and consistent with WTO rules. Members needed to promptly notify measures and allow the WTO to play its role in ensuring transparency. The availability of information of such measures constituted a fundamental element to understand their immediate scope and impact being an essential aspect in that complex scenario. The notification mechanisms recently established by the WTO should be maintained and strengthened to have complete information in real time. Argentina commended the Secretariat for its efforts in that regard and encouraged Members who had not yet done so to contribute to that transparency exercise.

1.73. Argentina had timely notified the WTO of the temporary suspension of the application of import tariffs, non-automatic licenses, anti-dumping duties, and certain fees and taxes for medical supplies related to COVID-19. During the pandemic, the obligation to submit an affidavit of product composition had also been eliminated while electronic documentation was being accepted for preferential certificates of origin. Furthermore, the work of the WTO to assess the impacts of the pandemic on trade and global value chains was crucial. In that work, Argentina considered it essential that special attention be paid to the effects on developing countries as well as on the most vulnerable sectors in particular MSMEs. It was in Members' interest to share good practices in that area in order to ensure that assistance reached those most affected.

1.74. Beyond the specific measures related to the pandemic, it was necessary to move quickly and conclude the pending negotiations of the WTO including the continuous reform of the agricultural trade rules and the prohibition of certain fishing subsidies. All of those would undoubtedly contribute to a stronger recovery in the post-pandemic scenario. At the same time, it was important to continue advancing with a strengthened and modernised WTO that could face the challenges of the 21st century including in the area of electronic commerce, MSMEs and investment facilitation. Today's world needed the spirit of global collaboration. Argentina was ready to continue coordinating a common response to the current crisis. In that task, the WTO had a crucial role to play not only

during the crisis, but also post-pandemic, thus contributing to an inclusive, strong and sustained economic recovery.

1.75. The representative of North Macedonia noted that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early March, the Republic of North Macedonia had faced severe health and socio-economic implications, unforeseen challenges to its citizens as well as burdensome challenges to the economic development. From the beginning of the crisis, North Macedonia had suspended most of its capacities of commercial trucks and air transportation for travels and shipment of goods. In that regard, it had to postpone the demand and to stall the scheduled deliveries and the opening of borders. The President of the country had proclaimed a State of Emergency on 11 March. From the outset of the proclamation, the Government had undertaken restrictive measures as immediate response to the pandemic and for the protection of public health and the population. Response measures had been developed in North Macedonia to cope with the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. In the spirit of solidarity, macro-financial assistance had been provided to all companies that had shown economic interest to work in those difficult conditions.

1.76. The adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on world trade had been demonstrated in recent months and it was expected that the downturn trend would continue. According to the latest statistics in March, the total trade volume in North Macedonia had declined by 8.3%, the export was down by 10.8% and the import was over by 6.3% and it continued to test the national capacity to overcome the situation. Nevertheless, its government was determined to actively engage in responding and resolving the negative effects of the crisis on the economic activity by outlining a set of scenarios for continuing trade reform and fulfilling strategic plans. Besides its internal market where restrictive trade measures for export of certain products had been undertaken, North Macedonia had also closely followed the WTO activities related to the COVID-19 crisis and had responded to concrete actions within the WTO. Regarding transparency, North Macedonia on 31 March had notified to the WTO Committee on Market Access and to the Committee on Agriculture trade-related measures on the prohibition of exports in emergency situation. That measure had been intended to protect human health and release a critical shortage of essential goods and had been in effect until 30 April 2020.

1.77. Concerning the activities related to the pandemic in the context of the WTO, North Macedonia had co-sponsored the Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System. With that statement, Members had sent a strong message that they would refrain from unjustified barriers in order to support economic recovery. As the current global economic emergency had negative impacts to MSMEs, North Macedonia had supported the statement for continued importance of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs to the global economy in times of COVID-19. North Macedonia would continue to work to ensure access to international trade for small businesses to build their resilience to greater shock. North Macedonia supported the efforts of the WTO in responding to the crisis, to the timely, accurate information on restrictive measures that influenced global trade during the period. Since every crisis was also an opportunity, all countries – developed and developing – should work together to overcome the multi-fold crisis. International solidarity and cooperation should prevail in overcoming the unprecedented crisis – resulting in a comprehensive transformation towards a more sustainable and a more resilient multilateral trading system.

1.78. The representative of the Republic of Korea said that the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting daily lives of people all around the globe. Cross-border flow of goods, services and personnel was being restricted to various extent and links in the global value chain regardless of their sizes were suffering from the uncertainty and unpredictability caused by the pandemic. Even work in the WTO had been practically crippled as all physical meetings had been suspended until the end of May. Fortunately, swift actions had been taken to produce high-level political statements underlining the importance of coordinated global response. G20 Leaders and Ministers as well as APEC Trade Ministers had demonstrated exemplary leadership on that front. In addition, many WTO Members including Korea had not hesitated to display the commitment to safeguard the global value chains and the rules-based multilateral trading system. The Joint Statement on Open and Predictable Trade in Agricultural and Food Products and the Ministerial Statement on the Multilateral Trading System were such examples. The most recent effort by Korea along with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore laid out specific action points to minimize the effect of the pandemic on trade and investment.

1.79. The statement circulated in WT/GC/214 entitled "Joint Ministerial Statement on Action Plans to facilitate the flow of goods and services as well as the essential movement of people" could be an

important reference document for possible discussion on a guideline in response to similar contingencies in the future. Korea looked forward to positive consideration and support from other Members and remained open to discussing that in further detail with interested delegations. It was difficult to predict when the pandemic would pass and what would take place afterwards. However, work by the WTO and what Members could accomplish in the WTO was critical. Transparency through the work under the monitoring pillar was the most important one in that regard. Members' efforts in notifying their emergency measures to COVID-19 in a transparent manner would provide a firm groundwork for discussions on the post COVID-19 landscape. Furthermore, the proactive work of the Secretariat in data compilation and presentation could be instrumental in such discussions. Korea stood in full support of such work.

1.80. Confronting crisis was not new for the WTO but the current pandemic made matters even worse. As every cloud had a silver lining, the crisis could however be turned into an opportunity to maintain and further the relevance of the organization. Some very important topics had been gaining more limelight in that regard such as the importance of e-commerce negotiations and the extension of the moratorium on electronic transmission. The relationship between trade and health was without a question the next area needing early attention. Brainstorming new mechanisms such as ensuring stable trade of essential medical products directly related to the pandemic could be useful and time-worthy effort. More importantly, it would ensure that the WTO could still deal with what the real world considered important. Korea stood ready to engage constructively with Members in that regard. On 14 May, the Members had been presented with an unexpected news from the Director-General. Korea had listened carefully to his remarks and understood and respected his decision. Going forward, Members should not waste any time and should work diligently for a smooth transition. Korea would fully engage with the GC Chair and other Members in the upcoming process.

1.81. The representative of the United Kingdom said that the meeting was timely as Members discussed the multilateral trade response to what was the most serious global challenge in a generation – one that was transforming the global trading system and as the WTO's own excellent analysis showed, one that risked seriously undermining it. The pandemic was already the worst international health emergency for over a century. By the time that was all over, it risked also becoming the worst economic crisis since the great depression – and the global, social and political crisis. The multilateral trading system had a critical role to play in mitigating that worst case scenario. To coin a phrase bending the curve of the crisis below the ability of the global, political and economic systems to cope, Geneva had already responded well and after a difficult negotiation World Health Assembly would adopt an important resolution on 18 May to guide them through the next phase of the pandemic and ensure that they learned and adapted as they went forward.

1.82. The WTO also had a major role to play. While the United Kingdom understood the challenges that the organization met informally, that was still the world's leading platform to discuss global trade with senior trade representatives from around the world. It was the place where the impact of COVID-19 on the global trading system should be discussed, where ideas and solutions should be shared and where initiatives to mitigate the global economic crisis to come launched. On the WTO response more specifically, the WTO was already playing an important monitoring role and the Secretariat had proactively placed information and published useful analytical pieces. The United Kingdom also welcomed all trade monitoring reports for example returning to the quarterly reports during the financial crisis. The United Kingdom also agreed with Switzerland that there was more that the WTO and its Members could do. The WTO needed to be the place where export restrictions and other trade measures in response to COVID-19 were reported, their consequences debated and their collective determination to resist serious damage they could do to the global economy expressed.

1.83. As Members had heard that day, many developing country partners as well as small island States and other vulnerable economies were experiencing serious trade shocks because of the crisis. That day, he would like to announce that through the UK Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund and its funding to the World Bank, the United Kingdom would be providing support to eligible developing country Members to better understand the trade-related impacts of COVID-19 on their economies, notify COVID-related measures to the WTO and tackle the COVID crisis through better trade facilitation. On the importance of continuing with regular business, the crisis should not set back the important work the WTO had been tasked with. Beyond ensuring the reinstatement of a fully functioning dispute resolution system and continuing the crucial regular monitoring and transparency work, Members needed to continue to work on live negotiations. They needed to get the agenda back on trade, get the WTO's formal processes back online and demonstrate to the world that the

WTO was part of the solution playing its essential role in helping the world build back better as they defeated the virus and mastered the crisis and reaffirming their commitment to open markets, free trade and the unprecedented prosperity and opportunities that they delivered.

1.84. The representative of the Dominican Republic, also on behalf of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, said that those five countries were aware of the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to safeguard the health of their population. They expressed their solidarity to all families affected because of the human tragedy caused by the pandemic and to all health workers in the world. They had listened closely to the notes made by the Director-General during the press conference with regard to the predictions for trade as a consequence of the disruptions caused by the pandemic that global trade for goods would experience a drop of between 13% and 32% for 2020. Similarly, their countries believed that the leadership position assumed by WTO Members to be positive underlining that trade would be an important component in the recovery process following COVID-19 and the fundamental need for markets to remain open, transparent, predictable and properly functioning under clear rules. However, it was necessary to ensure that public policies could be produced to implement measures needed to protect public health and well-being at a highly sensitive time – in line with WTO rules regarding transparency, clear objectives and timebound.

1.85. Their countries had been focusing specifically on the notifications relating to COVID-19 made by Members to the Secretariat. The measures relating to TBT, SPS and quantitative restrictions had been the ones most often applied given their link with the domestic supply of medical equipment and medicines to fight the pandemic. Their countries recognized the need that all Members had to safeguard the lives, wellbeing and health of their people. A proliferation of restrictive measures could however have an impact on the availability of basic medical supplies in developing countries who depended on imports in order to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Some countries who supported the declaration had taken temporary measures for essential products with the aim of combatting the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in order to ensure trade facilitation. Furthermore, they saw how the involvement of their products and important services in global value chain had been reduced.

1.86. They had also seen a considerable drop in foreign direct investments relating to those activities. Their countries therefore urged all Members to cooperate – promoting and defending an open, transparent, predictable and rules-based multilateral trading system. They called for transparency in the notifications to the WTO of trade measures which were being implemented by Members with the aim of eradicating the negative impacts of the pandemic which affected them all. They expressed sincere thanks to the Director-General for his efforts over the last seven years and for all the success in terms of the objectives of the organization. In strengthening the multilateral trading system, they very much valued his work with other organizations seeking a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation of its negative impacts on international trade.

1.87. The representative of the Philippines associated with the statements to be made by ASEAN which would highlight the recent statements of ASEAN Leaders, Economic, and Agriculture Ministers on the ASEAN response to COVID-19 circulated in document WT/GC/210 and by Malaysia concerning the Statement on COVID-19 by APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade circulated in WT/GC/213. The Philippines commended the Director-General's leadership and initiative in compiling up-to-date trade-related information from Members to promote transparency of trade measures taken in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, which ultimately helped to assess the pandemic's impact on global trade, as well as on WTO activities. As had been declared by the APEC Ministers and the G20, such measures should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and should not create unnecessary barriers to trade, and should be consistent with WTO rules.

1.88. The global health emergency could soon trigger a global economic crisis. It was imperative that Members strengthened their networks of solidarity and economic cooperation. In particular, the WTO needed a coordinated global response to support MSMEs which were crucial to job generation and economic resilience in that difficult period for the global economy. In that regard, the Philippines had joined 49 co-sponsors of the Statement on Highlighting the Importance of MSMEs in the time of COVID-19 in document WT/GC/215. Like all Members, the Philippines remained profoundly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 within its borders as well as its negative effects on the welfare of society and global socio-economic developments. Like many Members, the Philippines was forced to impose drastic measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippine Government had made a difficult but necessary decision to place most parts of the Philippines,

including its capital, on an Enhanced Community Quarantine starting on 17 March, which had recently been extended to 31 May.

1.89. To alleviate the adverse effects of the pandemic, several trade and trade-related measures had also been introduced by its government, including, among others, the exemption from import duties, taxes and other fees of critical equipment or supplies, such as medicines, medical equipment, and personal protective equipment, the grant of temporary regulatory and rediscounting relief measures to financial institutions affected by the COVID-19 situation, and the acceptance of electronic SPS-related certificates. For the governments of many developing countries such as the Philippines, COVID-19 imposed extraordinary financial and resource burdens in delivering much needed public health and emergency services, extending lifelines for vulnerable populations, and supporting critical sectors of the economy such as healthcare services, manufacturing, and agriculture. To effectively respond to that global public health emergency, their governments needed the policy space and resource flexibility required to finance critical interventions.

1.90. In that regard, the Philippines informed the General Council that, as had been notified to the WTO, its government had imposed, on an extraordinary basis, an additional 10 per cent customs duty on imported crude oil and refined petroleum products. The increase was merely temporary, timebound in nature, and consistent with ASEAN Leaders and Ministerial statements, as well as G20 and other declarations. For transparency, and in compliance with the Director-General's call, the Philippines had notified its relevant COVID-19 trade and trade-related measures to the WTO. Now, more than ever, Members should act cooperatively and decisively to manage the spread of the disease, while mitigating its adverse impact on the global economy and world trade. The Philippines looked forward to hearing Members' experiences in battling that deadly disease, in mitigating its adverse impact on their economies, and in minimizing the unprecedented disruption it had caused in their way of life.

1.91. The representative of Tajikistan said that his country was closely monitoring the developments related to the COVID-19 outbreak. To stop the spread of the virus, the relevant actions were being taken. Pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan dated 18 March 2020, to prevent the transmission and appearance of new cases of COVID-19 in the Republic of Tajikistan, a Working Party led by its Prime Minister had been established and two Action Plans for the prevention and mitigation of the potential risks of COVID-19 to national economy had been approved by its government. International cooperation was important and could tackle the pandemic if relevant policies were in place. COVID-19 had the potential to create devastating social, economic and political crises. Joint, decisive and timely effort in fighting the virus was therefore required. The Republic of Tajikistan greatly valued the WTO and acknowledged its central role within the rules-based multilateral trading system. Constructive cooperation within the WTO framework would allow Members to maintain economic cooperation amid the global spread of COVID-19.

1.92. The representative of Australia said that it was undoubtedly challenging for all Members to operate in the current environment, but the critical situation they faced means they should find ways to work together to assist the post-pandemic economic recovery. The COVID-19 crisis had heightened the importance of a stable and open global trading system – underpinned by the WTO – to effectively combat the pandemic and support economic recovery. Tempting as it could appear, as history had taught them, sheltering in protectionism would make all Members weaker. Some of the key ways in which the WTO could contribute to the recovery phase related to transparency and monitoring of trade measures, short-term initiatives addressing COVID trade-related measures and the resumption of WTO negotiations ahead of MC12.

1.93. Australia thanked the Secretariat for its excellent work on Monitoring and Transparency. That was particularly important while Members were instituting new measures that impacted trade. Members and their businesses, especially MSMEs, needed a better understanding of what was going on and how they could be affected. WTO committee work that provided a forum for dialogue on policy approaches would also be very valuable in that regard – by providing a forum to share best practices and to discuss where Members were facing difficulties with the policies of others. Keeping supply chains open was not only necessary to deliver medical supplies and essential goods, such as food, in the current crisis, but also for exports as their economies started to re-open. Recently, Members had seen trade-distorting measures introduced on critical medical supplies and Australia wanted to contribute to new work in that area to improve the production and supply chains, covering tariffs, export restrictions and potentially broader elements.

1.94. Agriculture supply chains and food security was an understandable concern for many Members. Agricultural trade was vital to global food security, and Australia had viewed with concern both export restrictive measures and increased subsidies, leading to further distortions. Members should continue efforts to ensure that those supply chains remained open, that export restrictions were avoided and that any COVID-19 related measures were temporary, transparent and fully consistent with WTO obligations. Australia was also interested in exploring ways to prevent the imposition of export restrictions more broadly, including commitments to rollback COVID-19 related measures to ensure temporary measures did not become permanent fixtures. Australia was pleased to have joined many Members in issuing Ministerial Statements committing to those principles and wanted to work with others to pursue more concrete initiatives to give substantive effect to those commitments.

1.95. Members should likewise not ignore the negotiating agenda. Updating the WTO rulebook would provide a much needed confidence boost to companies and investors facing uncertainty. Australia thought it was realistic to aim for a December General Council meeting to achieve some of the most pressing priorities. On fisheries subsidies, Members should achieve a meaningful outcome as agreed at MC11. That would be an important signal of the organization's capacity to come together in agreement. Members should aim for a comprehensive and effective agreement by December 2020. The e-commerce JSI negotiations had become even more important and had been identified by business as a key focus for the WTO post COVID-19. Australia was committed to work to take those negotiations forward, as soon as practicable.

1.96. Australia was also committed to continue its dialogue with the private sector to ensure real world perspectives, particularly on the impact of COVID-19, informed Members' deliberations. For example, business had highlighted the problem of relying on paper documentation to conduct international business, and the need to fast track adoption of electronic documentation and processes. On services domestic regulation, where negotiations were well advanced, an outcome should be feasible before MC12 and would provide a much needed boost for small services suppliers by improving transparency around key behind-the-border barriers, including licensing, qualifications and technical standards. Those were the areas Australia saw most potential and value for work to assist global economic recovery. Australia looked forward to working with other Members to take those forward.

1.97. The representative of Mexico said that in many parts of the world, the health emergency and measures to contain COVID-19 were being reflected in the economic dimension and social costs that had not been seen in several generations. The situation required Members to act responsibly and pragmatically in the immediate future so they should put the WTO back on track. Mexico noted that some Committees, such as the CBFA, CTD and Committee on Market Access, were already beginning to schedule their meetings in virtual format. It was urgent that WTO work continued to function, mainly in those bodies that discussed issues related to the measures imposed by COVID-19. Although those measures had been implemented at a time of urgency, Members should be attentive to such updates and ensure that they did not cause unnecessary damage in international markets. It was therefore crucial that Members were transparent in their notification and dismantling.

1.98. In the spirit of transparency, Mexico shared information on the measures it had imposed in recent weeks. Public procurement procedures had been established by electronic, optical or any other technology to execute and attend acts and meetings derived from the contracting processes themselves. To facilitate commercial exchange in the context of the health crisis, facilities for the shipment of plant, livestock, aquaculture and fishing products had been established on 27 March. To guarantee the continuity of foreign trade procedures, facilities were implemented to import goods subject to Official Mexican Standards. The terms of administrative procedures relating to foreign trade were extended and added the possibility of delivering documentation by electronic means. Mexico had not imposed any restrictions on trade covered by the health crisis thereby honouring the commitments made through various Ministerial Declarations and the call to keep markets open and to make the measures imposed in that context transparent. The crisis showed Members the need to accelerate their work to reform the organization to equip it with the necessary tools to better respond to current circumstances. Members could count on Mexico in that regard.

1.99. The representative of Nigeria associated with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP. There was no doubt that the pandemic was one of the most disruptive occurrences in the global economy since the Great Depression of 1930. Members were struggling to cope with the economic effects of lockdown measures and social dislocation triggered by COVID-19. Nigeria was

experiencing problems in capital flows and decline in demand and price of commodities produced. It was therefore critical for Members to pursue tariff agenda on essential products at the WTO. Nigeria also called for the suspension of the relevant clause under Article 11 of the GATT and Article 12 of the Agreement on Agriculture that had critical importance during times of crisis. Beyond the advanced global economic impact of COVID-19, there were some positive developments as the world experienced its potential growth on e-commerce and the digital economy. The benefits of that growth for developing countries were however ambiguous given the digital divide.

1.100. The multilateral trading system should be recalibrated to ensure it delivered tangible and sustainable benefits for all. The exercise should entail (i) refraining from rushing into undertaking WTO obligations with long-term economic implications in an attempt to address short-term COVID-19 economic crisis; (ii) strengthening partnership to enable Members to take advantage of TRIPS flexibilities to attain effective treatment and medicine to address that and other health emergencies; (iii) self-assessment by Members of their economic performance pre, during and post-COVID-19 with a view to mainstreaming their priorities in the ongoing WTO negotiations; (iv) provision of short-term relief for developing and vulnerable economies to allow for the implementation of measures needed to speed up economic recovery; and (v) provision of effective policy space for developing countries in any outcome of multilateral negotiations or JSI negotiations.

1.101. The representative of Albania said that the COVID-19 pandemic had proven to be far more than a health crisis – affecting the social and economic well-being of their societies at their core. The extraordinary challenges that the pandemic posed called for increased cooperation and coordinated responses both domestically and internationally. Transparency and information sharing were crucial in dealing with the global health emergency and the economic devastation brought about by the pandemic. Luckily, both the WHO and the WTO had established transparency mechanisms. In response to COVID-19, Albania had adopted export restrictions on medical goods which were duly notified to the WTO Secretariat. The Albanian Government had also adopted economic packages including fiscal, monetary and financial policy measures with the aim of mitigating the negative effects of public health controls on the economy and to sustain public welfare.

1.102. MSMEs represented majority of enterprises in Albania – accounting for over 79% of the total number of employees. The lockdowns and border closures had had staggering effects on households and businesses. Albania was therefore among the Members that had highlighted the importance of MSMEs in the time of COVID and supported the relevant statement circulated in document WT/GC/215. On a positive note, CEFTA members had implemented the original "Green Corridor System" to facilitate the transport and trade of goods within the region prioritising humanitarian goods. Such was a good example of regional cooperation and coordination as it provided new procedures at borders, consolidated lists of essential goods, safeguarded priority passage and harmonised sanitary measures. To speed up clearance procedures at the Green Border point, veterinary, SPS, food safety and sanitary inspectors of the CEFTA members had started receiving pre-arrival notices on essential goods – enabling them to plan required recourses.

1.103. Some 81% of trucks were using border crossings that were part of the Green Corridor. About 20% were carrying essential goods and waiting time was under 60 minutes. Albania's focus continued to be on efforts to protect human life. The measures Albania had taken were in line with the recommendations of the WHO. But it was equally vital that any trade restrictive measures deemed necessary to fight COVID-19 were targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, that they did not create unnecessary burdens to trade or disruption to global supply chains and that they were consistent with WTO rules. The rules-based multilateral trading system that was predictable, transparent, non-discriminatory and open was essential for sustainable economic recovery. The WTO had been sailing in rough waters for some time and the trade forecast was not exactly encouraging. The crisis also showed a remarkable level of solidarity and it was important for Members to seize that opportunity to chart the strategic direction of the organization for the years to come.

1.104. The representative of Paraguay associated with the Joint Declaration made by Argentina on behalf of some Latin American countries. Members were facing an unprecedented crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic had affected all Members without distinguishing levels of development or economic growth, generating one of the greatest health emergencies that had brought with it dire consequences for their economies. They however still had time to act and the WTO had an important role to play as a forum to promote transparency and compliance with its founding principles among the Members. Now, more than ever, Members should aim at predictability in trade in essential goods and services such as food, supplies and medical equipment, as well as strengthening international

cooperation. Paraguay had taken important measures in the health, employment, commercial and economic spheres, which aimed to provide a strong network of support to the healthcare system during the crisis, protect employment and the economy during the pandemic and create the conditions for economic recovery and employment.

1.105. Paraguay had approved several trade facilitating measures aimed at digitising and speeding up procedures, and temporarily reducing tariffs that allowed the importation of scarce and highly complex medical supplies and equipment. Those measures were included in the COVID-19 dedicated webpages of the WTO and the ITC, and Paraguay continued to work with national authorities to update them and include stimulus measures that its government had implemented for its economy. Paraguay urged all Members to continue to inform the Secretariat about such measures for the sake of transparency and for efficient monitoring to ensure that they were proportional, temporary and specific. Paraguay had not imposed a ban on exports of non-agricultural goods, nor restrictions on imports of agricultural products, in accordance with the commitment made in the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Agricultural Products and COVID-19, circulated in document WT/GC/208. Agro-exporters had an enormous responsibility in the supply of food, but that did not exempt importers from the responsibility of assuring the necessary opening so that those exports could reach their destination – ensuring the flow of the supply of products throughout the logistics chain. In that regard, Paraguay called on Members not only to implement facilitative measures, but also to avoid creating or implementing new obstacles that could affect food trade and food security.

1.106. Paraguay was concerned with the imposition of restrictive SPS requirements – more than those currently in force, especially in a period where the exercise of the rights of Members before the organization was affected by the suspension of meetings and as capitals focused more on giving an effective response to the pandemic. Being a landlocked developing country, Paraguay faced additional logistical obstacles as it was far from the main markets that were in a position to export extremely necessary goods such as medical supplies and equipment including ventilators and respirators. Paraguay therefore called on the Membership to comply with the Agreement on Trade Facilitation and a request for cooperation from transit countries during the crisis. Members' response to the crisis could understandably lead to some restrictions but the importation of products in transit should not be subject to measures that would prevent their effective arrival at the port of destination. Even in times of pandemic, solidarity was present. Paraguay thanked those Members who had made donations of medical equipment and protective equipment to its people – attending to the conditions and needs of Paraguay's healthcare system during that difficult period.

1.107. The representative of Japan joined others in highlighting the importance of transparency, and appreciated the ongoing efforts by the Secretariat to monitor trade-related measures by Members, including the report dated 23 April. While the number of notifications by Members had been growing, Japan called for Members to make timely notifications in line with WTO rules and to provide information promptly in response to the requests from the Secretariat. As had been agreed by the G20 and APEC Ministers, "emergency measures designed to tackle COVID-19, if deemed necessary, must be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary," and should be "consistent with WTO rules." As had been confirmed by the "Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System" dated 5 May and supported by 42 Members including Japan, Members should lift those measures as soon as possible. Japan called for Members to commit to the rollback. To that end, Members would need to have a mechanism to ensure transparency and to review whether the emergency measures had been lifted. Japan also expected that the Secretariat would continue to play a central role in monitoring and analysing trade-related measures.

1.108. The WTO as a whole should confirm such principles in the form of, for example, a decision by the General Council. Such codification could then serve as a fundamental rule to prevent the paralysis or dysfunction of the multilateral trading system in a future crisis. Japan was particularly concerned by the export restrictions of essential goods, such as medical and agricultural products. On agriculture, Japan had joined the statement for "responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with open and predictable trade in agricultural and food products." According to the analysis by Japan and four other Members, for the period of 2007-2012 when food prices had spiked, 251 export-restrictive measures had been introduced but only eight notifications had been submitted. To its regret, that was the past record. It was therefore important for the WTO, especially the COA, to review Members' export restrictive measures on agricultural products, and Japan welcomed the proposal by the COA Chair to hold a virtual meeting on 15 June.

1.109. The current pandemic had demonstrated the growing importance of electronic commerce. Members should extend the moratorium at MC12 and, for the JSI, they should soon resume negotiations in order to achieve substantial progress, such as the development of a consolidated text, at the earliest possible time. The WTO had an important role to play in maintaining the multilateral trading system in times of crisis. Further efforts should be made to promote WTO reforms. The pandemic had proven the essential role of WTO notifications, and it remained a matter of urgency to seek fundamental solutions for the reform of the dispute settlement system. At the highest political level, Japan was strongly committed to promoting free trade, and maintaining and strengthening the multilateral trading system through WTO Reform. In that regard, WTO meetings should resume as soon as possible. As for MC12, Japan welcomed the efforts by the General Council Chairman to coordinate on the new schedule of MC12. An early agreement on the new date was important to allow Members to have a clearer view on the way forward and to promote WTO work to help Members cope with the COVID-19 crisis.

1.110. The representative of Namibia associated with the statement made by the African Group and the ACP. The WTO as a rules-based institution provided the opportunity for economic growth and development of all Member States that were using obstacles to join to international trade and ensure a level playing field for all. As the WHO had declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, the contagion had led to unprecedented effects on the global trade regime which had prompted majority of Members to impose some form of export restriction on food, medical and medicinal supplies respectively to maintain domestic availability for such supplies. That enigma had affected the world at a time when some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were still in the process of recovering from severe drought which in some countries that had declared a State of Emergency had caused devastating effects among small economies that heavily depended on imports for essential products. COVID-19 should therefore serve as a wake-up call on all Members especially LDCs and developing countries in advocating for policy space and flexibilities within the multilateral trading system. In so doing, consideration should be made in providing flexibilities or exceptions within the TRIPS Agreement which seemed to be very stringent in the implementation.

1.111. The use of flexibilities under the TRIPS Agreement were not fully realised among developing countries due to a number of factors such as limited access to technology, access to data inclusive of TRIPS provisions through the declaration of emergencies to empower the judiciary to authorise government institutions or private companies to use any patented invention or services of the State. Paragraph 6 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health recognized that WTO Members with insufficient or no manufacturing capacity in the pharmaceutical sector could face difficulties in making effective use of compulsory licensing under the TRIPS Agreement. Namibia hoped that in line with SDG 3 on ensuring health and healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages including the resolution on Public Health that developing countries were accorded such privileges. Developing and LDC Members needed to see a dynamic shift of investment opportunities in the production of medicinal and medical goods in their economies. Namibia implored the Membership to abstain from the use of export prohibitions and restrictions on essential goods reaffirmed its commitment in achieving the objectives of the multilateral trading system.

1.112. The representative of Brazil said it was important that Members used the time they had to think about the implications of the crisis so that they could provide constructive recommendations. Economic fallout of the pandemic was and would continue to be a challenge for the WTO. But it also represented an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of having a solid multilateral trading system. It was hard to estimate the full economic and trade impacts of the measures taken to fight COVID-19 but by all accounts, the consequences would be dire. Members should make sure that they took the appropriate measures so that they did not inadvertently prolong the effects of that crisis. Currently, all countries were trying to strike a balance between public health and economic strength. Developing Members were more vulnerable to face that predicament. For Brazil, it was essential to assure economic growth in the long run and to guarantee prosperity, jobs and income for its population particularly to those in more fragile working conditions.

1.113. Trade and the WTO framework of rules should be now, more than ever, part of the solution for all Members particularly for developing ones. Brazil's approach for the post pandemic WTO was based on a four-fold roadmap. Members should collectively rollback restrictive and emergency measures as soon as possible in an effort to go back to the status quo ante. They should assess the situation at the General Council and decide on the way ahead as soon as the crisis subsided. Having the right set of priorities for continuing the process of the WTO Reform was crucial. Members should

set a new date for MC12 which would help them reorganize and resume their work based on the right set of priorities. As they had learned on 14 May, Members likewise needed to start the selection process for the new Director-General immediately.

1.114. The representative of Chile said that the pandemic had placed great pressure on the global system and had varying impacts with different depths on all Members. Members had been dealing with that on a national level but there were also global problems that had been experienced in various places. A global response was still pending. Various Members had made declarations which reaffirmed their commitments to WTO rules with the obligation of maintaining their markets on goods and services open, avoiding protectionist measures and supporting MSMEs. Chile therefore aligned itself with those declarations especially within the WTO context and in the UN fora. Chile supported the multilateral trading system. Members should ensure that it remained open and rules-based. Chile had kept its markets and its supply chains for various products open. Chile had sought to find measures which would facilitate cross-border trade especially for essential food products and such measures had been duly notified to the WTO. Approximately 60% of the Membership had likewise notified COVID-19 related measures to the WTO.

1.115. But the work of the WTO did not end with notifications. With regard to the trade measures that had been implemented, Members should ensure that those were in line with WTO rules. Chile urged all Members to ensure that any measure adopted during the pandemic be proportional, transparent, timebound and consistent with WTO rules. Members should draw lessons from the pandemic especially as scientists had noted that the pandemic could occur again in the future. Members should create a formal body in real time to analyse the impact caused by the pandemic. That body would be very relevant for future WTO work. As the Director-General had noted, Members had much work ahead of them. They needed to transform the pandemic into an opportunity to push forward WTO Reform and to realise tangible results in the ongoing negotiations. Members needed to look at actions that could be undertaken in all negotiating fronts and work together.

1.116. Fisheries subsidies was a priority for Chile and the WTO. Members should look at the subsidies that had been implemented to extend fishing opportunities especially during the pandemic and how they could further the work on eliminating fisheries subsidies. Chile reiterated its commitment to trade openness especially in agricultural matters with emphasis placed on domestic support. Members should act collectively in facing the various challenges ahead of them in opening international markets. Chile supported negotiations on services domestic regulation, e-commerce and investment facilitation for development and encouraged others to support the joint initiatives. With FDI's seeing a reduction between 30% to 40% in 2020 which would be its lowest level for over a decade, Members should start looking into the future and find ways for the WTO to help them achieve real economic recovery post COVID-19.

1.117. The representative of Colombia supported the preservation and strengthening of a multilateral rules-based system in the face of the COVID-19 emergency. Colombia had been active in discussing and endorsing a series of significant international initiatives such as the MPIA and multiple declarations pointing towards the importance of maintaining predictability and openness in international trade relations particularly under the current emergency situation. Colombia had also been active on notifications on communications related to COVID-19 showing great deference to a transparent dialogue among the Membership. Despite certain current criticisms of the system, the existence of the WTO and its rules had been key in finding moderation during those difficult times avoiding as much as possible dangerous and unjustifiable protectionist measures. That was highly commendable especially from the perspective of MSMEs.

1.118. Without those rules, reactions to the pandemic would have probably been more drastic and more arbitrary, worsening an already difficult situation. Colombia was appreciative of the role that the WTO rules had had even when day to day work in the organization appeared to have been more passive than usual. Now, Members should start to fully switch to active mode. Colombia understood the difficulties and concerns that had directed the Membership towards the cautionary approach. Colombia itself had suffered from them too. But uncomfortable as they could be, Members needed to take progressive and bolder steps towards a mix of virtual and physical presence as could be feasible even for negotiations and urgent decisions. That could not be easy but with political will and by always bearing in mind the recommendations of the Swiss Federal Council, Members could walk that path.

1.119. As WTO Members, they needed to step up and do what the organization needed them to do. The WTO was a Member-driven organization and they should act like it. The WTO was no more than their collective effort as Members to move forward a substantial trade and trade-related agenda. That was their task and they should face it and deliver on it with utmost responsibility. Difficult times should be taken as an opportunity to find new ways to achieve their common goals. They should move forward and make decisions on a timely and efficient manner. As had been mentioned by others earlier that day, a global crisis required a global response. The multilateral trading system structured under the WTO framework served as an appropriate forum to foster and exercise international coordination. In the face of mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic, Members should also bolster economic resilience. In turn, the multilateral trading system depended on their work and their will to cooperate. Colombia assured the Membership that it was ready to engage constructively and deliver on their work.

1.120. The representative of the European Union said that the pandemic was impacting citizens across all parts of the world and all sectors of the economy – demand had dropped, supply chains were disrupted, investments were put on hold. There were certainly lessons to be learned from the unprecedented situation. But one thing was clear, COVID-19 had highlighted the interconnectedness of global economies and societies. It was a global problem that required a global solution and part of that solution was a reinforced, open, rules-based multilateral trading system. The pandemic did not strengthen the arguments of those who, pre-crisis, had called for protectionism, local content/import substitution policies, economic nationalism, unfair and discriminatory state intervention and the weakening of international institutions. It strengthened the case against them. Trade restrictive measures would create a downward spiral that would be harmful to all Members when what they desperately needed was for trade to help them escape from the deep economic trough into which they had fallen. Open trade, on the other hand, would broaden the impact of demand as it returned. A stable, open, predictable trading system was also the foundation they needed to address other key challenge raised by the outbreak – building more resilient supply chains. The shortages of essential products linked to the pandemic had certainly revealed weaknesses.

1.121. As Members addressed that, they should acknowledge a simple truth that no country could secure the supply of all the products it needed on its own. That had never been the case in the history or pre-history of human economic activity. It was certainly not the case in a world so deeply interconnected by transport and communications technologies as theirs. A high degree of global economic integration was not a policy choice. It was a fact of life. The only question was how they regulated it together. And in fact global, sustainable and resilient supply chains were a key element in effectively guaranteeing supplies in emergencies since they allowed access to a broad range of suppliers. They were also the most future proof since they did not know what products would be essential in a future crisis which would not be a simple repeat of the current pandemic. Furthermore, others would mention that the option of reshoring production was not open to the more vulnerable developing and least-developed countries. Finally, mass reshoring would increase competition for scarce resources, drive up prices and deepen the international tensions which had hampered an effective global response to the crisis. It would be a lose-lose situation for the global community and be highly damaging to the smaller companies who had been hardest hit, as had been noted in the statement on MSMEs circulated on 14 May which the EU had signed. The fundamental lesson of COVID-19 was therefore that Members needed more stability and predictability based on WTO rules, not less. In practice, this would mean different things at different times.

1.122. In the short-term, work should focus on transparency and health. The WTO had a vital role to play on transparency. As had been agreed at the G20, where the EU had been playing a leadership role, the WTO should become the focal point for transparency on the many COVID-19 trade-related measures that Members were taking. For the EU, that should cover measures not only related to the direct health response but also to the many economic support measures. The EU was one of only a few Members to have reported on both. The EU encouraged others to join. The WTO was tracking that which was very much welcomed but it should also confront Members with their shortcomings if need be. The EU asked the Secretariat to report in full on the situation, and if necessary, to "name and shame" those Members not willing to engage in earnest in the transparency effort. The EU had made proposals to improve compliance with notification requirements. That work strand had become even more important in the current context and it was a priority for the EU moving forward to see progress in making the WTO's monitoring function work properly. Members should frontload the issue in the coming months. On health, the COVID-19 crisis had shown the importance of affordable access globally to healthcare products on a predictable and lasting basis, to which the WTO could contribute. The EU was therefore exploring how efforts could be deployed to facilitate trade,

eliminate tariffs on medicines and protective equipment as well as address non-tariff restrictive measures, including on the export side. The WTO could also encourage Members to work collaboratively to develop, test and scale-up production of safe, effective, quality diagnostics, medicines and vaccines for the COVID-19 response, including through existing mechanisms for voluntary pooling of rights and licensing.

1.123. But Members' other short-term priorities would be precisely to keep in their sights the medium and long-term. The WTO should be an essential tool in addressing the fall-out from the crisis. In the enormous effort that would be needed to ensure a global recovery and build resilience, Members needed global rules to maintain stability and predictability. They should complete the fisheries subsidies negotiations within the 2020 deadline set by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. An updated multilateral rulebook was needed to ensure that value chains remained functional and open, notably through enhanced transparency, services and investment facilitation measures and new rules on digital trade. Digital trade had proven to be a critical issue in the current crisis and its development would contribute to building resilience and crisis response in the future. International rulemaking through the WTO on e-commerce could not wait any longer. Renewed rules to address level playing field issues would contribute to fighting against unfair competition and contribute to the diversification of global value chains. Members would need to step up cooperation on the significant state support measures currently being taken to ensure a return to market-based operations based on resilience, openness and fairness during the recovery to growth.

1.124. The sustainability agenda should play a prominent role in the reform efforts. Eliminating barriers to the trade of goods and services that helped mitigate climate change would contribute to sustainable development and a green recovery, including in developing Members and LDCs – as would improving policy coherence between the WTO and other international organizations on the trade, health and sustainability agendas. To ensure the necessary certainty and predictability that would be needed, now, more than ever, for Members' economies to recover from the crisis, it was of particular importance that the impasse concerning Appellate Body appointments be resolved, including necessary reforms, so that they could restore a dispute settlement system that worked for, and applied to, all WTO Members. The EU was conscious that it was a very broad agenda for an organization that had already been facing a deep crisis before the pandemic. But that was the hand they had been dealt. The pandemic had made preservation and reform of the rules-based multilateral trading system even more urgent and important than before. The EU therefore welcomed the Ministerial Statement circulated by Switzerland on behalf of the "Friends of the System" that passed the message. They should urgently pursue work on reforming the WTO to ensure that it remained the bedrock of open markets and free trade and contributed to the recovery effort post-crisis.

1.125. The EU welcomed that the G20 Trade Ministers had urged on 24 May to promote the necessary reform of the WTO and had provided guidance on market opening efforts by calling to explore COVID-19 related WTO initiatives to promote open and more resilient supply chains and taking note of plurilateral work on e-commerce. But the first step was even more basic than that. The WTO should resume its work, virtually and safely, but also urgently. The EU welcomed the holding of the virtual session and commended the Chairs of Committees and Negotiating Groups for their efforts to find solutions to allow other bodies to meet safely. Members should urgently find pragmatic solutions for meetings to take place virtually and decisions to be taken in another form. In doing so, Members should recognize that some of them would have capacity constraints and should prioritise accordingly – most urgent and important was the operation of the DSB. The WTO should innovate as had been done in other international organizations.

1.126. The representative of Barbados associated with the statements made by the ACP and CARICOM and noted that it was only through the multilateral coordination and international development cooperation that would ensure that all countries could effectively recover from the crisis. Barbados therefore hoped that the special virtual meeting was the first of many meetings on the issue. In setting the context for elaborating on Barbados' views on COVID-19, like many other Members, Barbados had been and was continuing to grapple with the impact of the economic crisis which had emerged from the pandemic. All Members were therefore in this together albeit in varying degrees. The imposition of sweeping measures including travel bans and border closures on a global scale had had an instantaneous effect on the Barbadian economy. Now, whilst the full impact was yet to be determined, Barbados confirmed that the economic gains that the country would have generated in recent history had already been effectively eroded. Barbados was faced with burgeoning debt levels, limited financial resources to spread across critical priority areas, decrease in foreign exchange and high unemployment. The UN forecasted that small island developing States

like Barbados would continue to be the most disproportionately impacted group of countries owing to their extreme vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks, their high dependence on trade, their insularity and dependence on a few economic sectors.

1.127. For Barbados and many other SIDS, that redounded to their dependence on tourism as the main source of foreign exchange and employment and their dependence on the importation of food to guarantee their food security. In the outset of the pandemic, there had been a marked increase of export restrictions and prohibitions that had been invoked by Members in the name of COVID-19. A significant number of those had been specific to foodstuff, medical supplies, medicines and medical equipment thereby threatening public health and the food security of small vulnerable islands that did not have the capacity to produce those items and were NFIDCs and therefore heavily reliant of the importation of the majority of the food that they consumed. Barbados urged Members to consider the impact of such measures on small countries. Barbados had joined the Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System led by Switzerland. Barbados remained cognizant that the WTO Covered Agreements allowed for flexibilities in the rules for emergency situations such as the current one. Barbados was also mindful that invoking such flexibilities was not without condition. Any measures involving those modalities should be temporary and should not be applied arbitrarily or discriminatory and should not serve as disguised restrictions to trade.

1.128. Barbados had vested interested in the trade-related measures that were involved in the name of COVID-19 and therefore took note of the growing number of proposals being submitted by Members particularly those that outlined specific proposals for further market access in various areas. Members' focus and efforts should be channelled towards their response and recovery from the economic crisis – ensuring that the vulnerable amongst them were given adequate policy space and S&DT in their efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic had again raised some of the critical questions regarding the adequacy of the flexibilities available to small, vulnerable economies like Barbados. It had also served as a timely reminder that economic development could not and was not merely to be determined by a country's per capita income. There was much more than that a multilateral institution like the WTO could do to assist countries in their response and recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19. The WTO continued to be a rules-based multilateral organization that was Member-driven and spoke in the principles of inclusivity, transparency and non-discrimination. Barbados was committed to continuing the discussions on the economic impact of the pandemic.

1.129. The representative of Egypt commended the Secretariat for its efforts in compiling the trade-related measures applied in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Egypt associated with the statement made by the African Group. There was a need to give due consideration to the effects of the pandemic on developing countries and African Countries in particular. An urgent and coordinated response to focus on how to speed up their health systems and ensure access to medical supplies and essential food products as well as overcoming the huge income losses was needed. Like many Members, Egypt had been impacted by the pandemic. The related global recession had become even more realistic. The Government had responded to the pandemic and provided the Central Bank had implemented timely related measures to support the economy.

1.130. Egypt had taken some decisions to fulfil the domestic demand from some essential goods including medical supplies and some agricultural products. Such measures had been notified to the WTO. Egypt was continuously reviewing them as the pandemic developed and would keep the WTO informed with the relevant updates. Some measures including postponement of property tax payments had been applied to support the business sector especially the most affected such as the MSMEs. On the social front, Egypt had extended the coverage of its social safety net to include the vulnerable segment significantly affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, regionally and internationally, Egypt was working constructively to coordinate efforts for developing a set of mitigation measures, the establishment of the African Union Continental Solidarity Anti-COVID-19 Fund and the contribution to the Africa Centres to support African Union Member States in the fight against COVID-19 – were concrete examples to share.

1.131. At such an unprecedented time, Members should keep their solidarity within the global response to overcome the crisis (i) to protect the health of the people; (ii) to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the crisis especially on the most affected countries resulting from governments holding revenues and debt payment increase and (iii) to pave the way for quick global economic recovery. The WTO had an important role to play in coordination with other international organizations within that context. From the WTO perspective, some exceptional measures were needed. However, they should be transparent, temporary and consistent with WTO rules. With the

way forward, Members in the short-term needed to safeguard domestic markets' needs and keep supply chains open for sustaining the essential need and food security of other Members. For the long-term, the reform of WTO rules should allow the developing and LDC Members to adopt trade policies that enabled them to industrialise and diversify their economies in order to be resilient to other external shocks bearing in mind that the TRIPS flexibilities would help them to access medicine and vaccines needed to combat the pandemic in the coming two months.

1.132. The representative of Singapore said that the meeting was important and timely because COVID-19 had unleashed a massive shake-up of the world. As the Director-General had said at the TNC/HODs on 17 April, "we are facing the deepest recession of our lifetimes". In that context, Singapore proposed three suggestions as Members worked together to respond to the crisis. First, Members should learn from history and avoid repeating the same mistakes. As trade historian Douglas Irwin had observed regarding the Great Depression of the 1930s, "the general contraction of trade led by trade barriers harmed the world economy and probably made the Great Depression worse". That was a real prospect that Members should avoid. In contrast, the global community had resisted the temptation to resort to protectionism during the 2008 global financial crisis and had averted a prolonged depression. That had been possible because the G20 "got out ahead of the problem", by agreeing to "refrain from raising new barriers to investment or to trade in goods and services, imposing new export restrictions, or implementing WTO inconsistent measures to stimulate exports". The lesson was therefore clear: major economies should take the lead, including at the WTO, and show the way to encourage the global community to overcome the tendency to look inwards. But leadership could also be exercised by medium and small Members.

1.133. Second, every WTO Member, regardless of size, could make a difference. A fine example was the recent Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System, which was endorsed by a wide spectrum of WTO Members – big and small, developed and developing. Singapore was proud to be associated with this Ministerial Statement, which had stressed that "trade restrictive emergency measures aimed at protecting health, if deemed necessary, shall be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains, and be consistent with WTO rules". Equally important, they had pledged "to lift any such measures as soon as possible". In a similar vein, Singapore together with a group of ten other like-minded small and medium-sized Members had issued the Joint Ministerial Statement on Supply Chain Connectivity, underlining their collective commitment to ensure that supply chains remained unimpeded. Together with New Zealand, they had gone a step further by launching the Declaration on Trade in Essential Goods for Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic in April. The Declaration concretised Singapore and New Zealand's commitment to "maintain open and connected supply chains amidst the COVID-19 pandemic". Most recently, on 1 May, Singapore, together with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea, had issued a Joint Ministerial Statement on Action Plans to Facilitate the Flow of Goods and Services as well as the Essential Movement of People. Besides ensuring that trade channels remained open and supply chains stayed connected, the action plans included expediting customs procedures for essential goods and facilitating essential cross-border travel. Singapore hoped that other Members would take similar concrete steps to strengthen the multilateral trading system, by dismantling barriers to trade and refraining from imposing new ones.

1.134. Third, Members should ensure that the WTO continued ticking in the midst of the pandemic. At a time when COVID-19 was wreaking havoc on societies, livelihoods and trade, it was untenable for the WTO to stand still. While Singapore recognized that responding to the pandemic had placed severe strains on their national capacities and bandwidth, Members should not allow the WTO to grind to a halt. On the contrary, they should exercise maximum flexibility to continue the important on-going work at the WTO such as the negotiations on fisheries subsidies. Similarly, Members should accelerate progress in the JSIs on E-Commerce and MSMEs, given that the pandemic had underlined the importance of e-commerce, and the damaging impact on MSMEs. Finally, the pandemic had underscored the urgency for all WTO Members to commit to not imposing export restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme (WFP). According to the WFP, 821 million people worldwide were chronically hungry, and the pandemic could push an additional 130 million people to the brink of starvation by the end of 2020. Their collective actions, as Members of the WTO, could make a difference in the global fight against COVID-19.

1.135. The representative of Norway said that, as with any type of crisis, the first priority was to manage the crisis and limit the negative consequences, and secondly to take what one had learned

from the crisis and use those lessons to be better prepared for whatever the future could bring. The first lesson, in terms of trade policy, was the fundamental importance of trade in securing access to vital goods and services. Disruptions of trade flows, whatever caused the disruptions, were not only hampering the response to the health crisis, but would also slow down the economic recovery. The pandemic represented a sobering reminder of the fundamental importance of open economies and rules based trade. Neither the health crisis nor the economic crisis could effectively be dealt with by any individual country in isolation. Those were global challenges and had to be addressed in a global setting. Declaring support for the rules-based multilateral trading system was important. Norway's Minister had joined various statements including the one referred to by Switzerland. But even more important than that was to do as they preached.

1.136. Members had to demonstrate through their actions that they respected the rules and complied with their WTO obligations. That included being transparent about any measures they imposed in response to the pandemic, ensuring that any such measures were temporary and minimally trade distorting, and that they did what they could to keep trade flowing. In the WTO, that also meant close monitoring of support measures as the Membership started rolling back emergency measures and phasing out temporary government support and assistance introduced in response to the pandemic. One particular lesson learned from the crisis was that of the challenges related to access to medicines and vital medical supplies. One reason for that was related to export restrictions and other trade restrictive emergency measures aimed at protecting health. Those were highly sensitive and complicated issues where Members' legitimate interests could be at odds. Nevertheless, Members' ambition should be to adopt a decision at MC12 on how to ensure global supply of vital medical goods.

1.137. Looking forward to MC12, Members should not lose their focus on reform. Meaningful reform was needed to safeguard the multilateral trading system. At the top of Norway's priority list for reform remained the successful conclusion of the fisheries subsidies negotiations. By implementing SDG 14.6, Members could clearly demonstrate that the WTO delivered multilateral results. Its signalling effect could not be overestimated. Members should also continue their efforts to update the rulebook in line with the digital realities of the 21st century. The pandemic had clearly demonstrated the timeliness of the e-commerce negotiations and the urgent need for results. Members should also realise that the pandemic would have the most severe consequences in the poorest countries. That was one more argument in support of the need to incorporate the development dimension in a pragmatic way when negotiating new or improved rules and in their regular work. Members should protect the system by abiding by the rules. They should address trade policy challenges to ensure access to vital supplies across borders and limit the imposition of trade restrictive measures as much as possible. They should continue the reform efforts with special focus on fisheries subsidies and e-commerce while always taking the development dimension into account.

1.138. The representative of Peru noted that the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic posed upon Members an unprecedented challenge. Recent studies projected a huge impact on the global economy. Members' joint efforts should therefore be focused on adopting measures that ensured the health and safety of their citizens while establishing a foundation for a rapid and sustainable economic recovery. All Members were facing a global crisis that required a coordinated international response making it important to intensify cooperation between the WTO and other international organizations. The depth and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted the dynamics of international trade. A predictable, transparent, non-discriminatory and open multilateral trading system would therefore be essential for a sustainable economic recovery. Peru recognized the important role that the WTO played in guaranteeing the stability, predictability and transparency of the multilateral trading system. Given the current complex situation, Peru reiterated its commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system.

1.139. Recognizing that the proper functioning of supply chains and the opening of trade would allow for the adequate provision of food, medical equipment and other essential goods and services in the current situation, Peru supported the efforts of Members in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade, encouraging concrete actions aimed at facilitating the cross-border flow of essential supplies and applying simplified best practices and procedures. Peru therefore reaffirmed its commitment not to adopt measures that created unnecessary barriers to trade or disrupted global supply chains and to ensuring the consistency of its measures with WTO rules.

1.140. Like most Members, Peru had taken domestic measures to strengthen key sectors and minimize the impact of COVID-19. Those included declaring a national health emergency and

mandatory social isolation, aimed primarily at reducing the spread of the virus in the country without affecting the provision of basic services, health care and food for the population. Mandatory social isolation did not apply to export and import operations, which could be conducted as usual. Peru also adopted economic protection measures for vulnerable households in poverty and extreme poverty to help reduce the impact on the Peruvian economy due to the high risk of COVID-19 spreading nationwide. Peru likewise temporarily reduced the tariff rate to 0% on goods imported to deal with problems related to the declared national health emergency.

1.141. Other measures included creating a Business Support Fund for MSMEs so that they had access to financing and were able to overcome economic difficulties stemming from the state of emergency due to the pandemic – allowing them to continue operating and to recover without undermining the payment of their debts. Peru also established the Reactivate Peru Programme to guarantee funding for the replenishment of working capital funds of companies facing payments and short-term obligations vis à vis their workers and suppliers of goods and services. Peru had informed the WTO of those measures and several others in last semester's report on trade-related measures and would continue to report and submit the relevant notifications for COVID-19 related measures. It was vitally important to promote the exchange of information and transparency as an effective way of reducing uncertainty and tackling the crisis. Peru therefore encouraged Members to continue informing the WTO of any trade-related measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.142. The representative of Sri Lanka said that the spread of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka had been controlled satisfactorily by up to around 90% but it was too early to decide on a definitive date on when all restrictions could be lifted. Sri Lanka currently had 960 cases with 439 recoveries and 8 deaths due to the pandemic. The lockdown measures had relaxed with certain exemptions. It was an understatement that the current COVID crisis had gotten unprecedented challenges to a number of, if not all, WTO Members. Many Members had taken and had notified a number of COVID-related measures to the WTO. Sri Lanka could not ignore the critical situation with its economy due to an array of challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic had been the most complex and difficult one to deal with. Sri Lanka had done its role in limiting trade-related restrictions by lifting the temporary export ban on medical items including PPE products and even had become a global supplier of masks and PPE products to the rest of the world by recently shipping face masks and PPE products to the United States and other countries when normal suppliers were still not able to do so. Sri Lanka had also opened up its national airlines – Sri Lankan Airlines, and air and seaports including Colombo and Hambantota for other countries to use for their chartering of services and using as transit points for ensuring the normal supply sources continued with the smooth flow of goods when most of the countries had not been able to do so.

1.143. In some contrast to the measures notified by other Members, the measures so far taken by Sri Lanka appeared to be based on an economic rationale covering a broad range of products – also covering certain activities in the financial sector. Sri Lanka was currently taking genuine attempts to analyse how it could deal with the challenges post COVID-19 as a middle income country trapped in the middle income track and how it could find ways and means to avoid an escape from that status while trying to align its measures with WTO rules. Members should demonstrate an understanding for emergency measures of that kind especially if those measures were imposed for a long period of time. Sri Lanka stressed the importance of transparency by making the purpose and precise nature of those measures clear and by determining if those measures did not disproportionately burden foreign traders over domestic economic actors.

1.144. Sri Lanka was evaluating the applicability of new innovative and renewed trade and economic policies that were contributing to reduce Sri Lanka's heavy and over reliance on imports of essential goods such as pharmaceuticals, food items and raw materials for key export products using the flexibilities available within the WTO legal system. Sri Lanka was in the process of identifying and adopting a new trade agenda of the future through an array of areas. The following aspects would be covered: how Sri Lanka could effectively use the existing flexibilities to deal with economic unemployment crisis; how to use the WTO Decision on Net Food Importing Developing Countries to effectively secure funding from the donor agencies to build infrastructure in the agriculture sector enabling Sri Lanka to build adequate public stockholding and essential food commodities to be used during unforeseen circumstances; and, the ability to use other tools such as SSM and PSH for building Sri Lanka's self-sufficiency in essential food production, among others. Coming to the WTO agenda and ongoing trade liberalization, time was a crucial factor. It was inappropriate for Members to take long-term policy decisions during a temporary crisis such as the current one. Tariff policy for

Sri Lanka which was the only effective instrument for according protection against import surges and to safeguard domestic industry. It was therefore critical for Sri Lanka to retain such flexibility.

1.145. The representative of Afghanistan noted that with the current global public health crisis, the world was facing an unprecedented situation. Members constituted an entire establishment and their capabilities were challenged. Whether developed or advanced, Members were struggling to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to recover from it. The developing world, the LDCs, the LLDCs, the small fragile and in-conflict affected countries were even more exposed to the pandemic given their vulnerability and lower level of development for public healthcare and their capacity to properly navigate their countries' fight against the pandemic and recover from it. In Afghanistan, data suggested that it was just at the beginning of the outbreak. To date, Afghanistan had registered around 6,050 confirmed cases with 153 deaths – and those figures could even be hiding the actual number of infections given the lack of test kits. According to the estimation from the Afghan Health Ministry, 80% of the population which was about 25 million would be infected and the death toll could reach more than 100,000. Since the end of March, all shops and businesses with the exception of food stores, pharmacies and healthcare services were closed down and caused a widespread of collateral damage to their owners and workers. According to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce, 82% of MSMEs were severely impacted by the crisis, the outbreak and the lockdown. Trade had been suspended due to the border closure with the neighbouring countries – causing losses and higher inflation due to the shortage of goods in the market.

1.146. 96% of Afghanistan's customs revenue had not been collected due to the closure of the borders and tax had decreased by 30%. More than 270,000 Afghan immigrants and refugees had returned from Iran and Pakistan since the pandemic outbreak had started without any credible health checks or other safety measures at the border. The fear of widespread poverty and famine was a real prospect due to the outbreak and the consequent lockdown and trade and investment suspensions. The Taliban and other terrorist groups had increased their deadly attacks on military and innocent civilians since the outbreak. That occurred against the fact that the Afghan Government had offered the Taliban a ceasefire during the pandemic to fight the virus which had been put down by the group. Even insurgent groups had expanded their terror activities targeting the country's energy and transport infrastructures at the time when they were most needed. They had recently destroyed several roads and a number of power transmission towers causing the destruction of supply of electricity to the capital and other provinces. Afghanistan's experience had illustrated the case of the fragile and in-conflict affected countries particularly the members of the g7+ WTO Accessions Group – as they were fighting two or more enemies at the same time – the insurgent groups, poverty and COVID-19. Members should therefore come out with a coherent and cooperative global response. Lack of adequate and tailored response to the pandemic would have catastrophic human and institutional consequences making the cost of inaction very high.

1.147. Concerning the multilateral trade response, Afghanistan commended the Director-General's efforts and leadership in ensuring transparency and coordination with other international organizations to lay the ground for an immediate response in managing trade matters from the crisis and helping the trade flow as much as it could. Afghanistan recognized Members who were trying to minimize disruptions and trade flows. Afghanistan had joined Switzerland and other proponents' initiative for introducing the Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System, thanked the 42 Members for the support to that initiative and called on other Members to join. As had been indicated in that statement, trade restrictive emergency measures aimed at protecting health if deemed necessary should be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary and not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruptions to global supply chains and be consistent with WTO rules. The global economic shock would continue to require a coordinated international response. Afghanistan also supported the LDC Group Communication circulated on 4 May especially on trade measures taken by WTO Members since the outbreak of the virus. Export prohibitions or restrictions should not be imposed on products identified by the WTO as critical to combatting COVID-19 and such products were exported to LDCs for their domestic use or for humanitarian purposes. The LDCs' call for unrestricted or prohibited exports also covered those products. Afghanistan likewise supported the COVID-19 related MSMEs statement proposed by the Friends of MSMEs. Any strategy to battle COVID-19 in the LDCs and fragile, in-conflict affected countries should be a global one and should not reflect the consequences of Members' inactions and negligence due to any trade protective measures, inward policies and so-called "me first" approaches.

1.148. The representative of the Republic of Moldova associated with the statement made by the co-sponsors of the Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System circulated

in WT/GC/212 and the statement on Highlighting the Importance of MSMEs in the time of COVID-19 circulated in WT/GC/215. Moldova commended the efforts made by the leaders of those initiatives – Switzerland, Norway, Canada, Mexico and Uruguay. The global health crisis and subsequently the economic one was currently the highest priority for all Members. As a Friend of the System and MSMEs, the Republic of Moldova was deeply concerned about developments related to COVID-19 and its effect on trade, the multilateral trading system and the MSME sector. The situation necessitated all Members to join hands in working for the cause of fighting the pandemic while keeping trade open, transparent, predictable and not discriminatory and the multilateral trading system central and fully functional. Members should ensure facilitation of trade flows by ensuring non-distorted trade in response to the current global crisis caused by COVID-19.

1.149. The Republic of Moldova had notified of imposing only one restrictive measure on the export of medical equipment, facemasks, gloves and sanitizers which was in line with WTO rules. The rest of its measures were trade-facilitating in character and related to economic support in terms of fiscal, monetary, social and administrative measures targeting trade in goods and trade in services. Supporting MSMEs was likewise necessary especially during these difficult times. MSMEs should become a priority given that the sector was among the most affected by the measures imposed during the pandemic. In Moldova's case, SMEs constituted around 98% of its enterprises. Moldova also appreciated the delegations that had promptly notified their COVID-19 related measures affecting trade in goods and services and measures supporting MSMEs. Unfortunately, many measures particularly in the services sectors had not been notified. For the sake of transparency and predictability, Moldova highlighted once again the importance of providing updated information on that and other measures in due time.

1.150. The representative of Costa Rica said that the leadership that the WTO should assume in the face of the current situation was fundamental. Costa Rica was therefore pleased with the mechanism made available to carry the discussion forward and the efforts of the Members and the Secretariat to ensure the transparency of those measures. Costa Rica had actively participated in that exercise and had notified the information regarding the measures imposed during the current period. Trade had been and would continue to be an effective instrument for progress and for overcoming the difficult situation faced by their economies as a result of the crisis caused by COVID-19. Driven by the forces of trade, the world had changed significantly in recent decades. Information and communication technologies had helped to revitalise trade by reducing the distances that had previously separated them and had also been fundamental for dealing with lockdown and maintaining communication in business environments, in their family and social lives, with such tools offering new uses and forms of interaction.

1.151. Technology had radically changed the way Members produced goods and services. The expansion of supply chains had strengthened ties between economies. Members should seek mechanisms that further strengthened those supply chains so that they could continue to function properly and to drive global growth and prosperity. In difficult and uncertain times such as the current one, arguments in favour of international trade were once again being put to the test. Members should not forget the lessons of world history in which international trade had often been a casualty of global crises. The crisis that the world had experienced almost a century ago had spelled the end of an ambitious global market opening scheme: countries had turned inward and the resulting decline in trade had fuelled nationalist and authoritarian movements that humanity had paid for with devastation and suffering. Members could not afford to repeat those mistakes.

1.152. Nowadays, Members shared benefits and challenges: national problems took on an international dimension and national crises were globally linked. The global nature of the crisis reminded Members that the welfare of each one of them concerned them all. Costa Rica therefore noted with concern signs of a sharp contraction in global economic activity as well as calls for protectionism and economic nationalism which would affect employment and world trade flows, deepening the crisis and increasing poverty. Costa Rica had thus joined several statements at the Ministerial and Head of Delegation level, such as the statement circulated by Switzerland in document WT/GC/212 and the statement on maintaining open and predictable trade in agricultural and food products circulated by Canada in document WT/GC/208. Members should ensure that all measures taken in that context were transparent, exceptional and temporary in nature which should be fully in line with the provisions of the WTO Agreements, particularly Article XI of the GATT. Cooperation among Members and the commitment of all to avoiding protectionism was now much more important as Members embarked on their path to recovery.

1.153. The representative of the Russian Federation noted that Russia had made a number of steps in response of the pandemic including trade measures and general economic support measures – which had all been notified to the WTO. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis had clearly revealed the importance of greater multilateral cooperation including the need to improve the global trading system. The WTO's response to COVID-19 should be concentrated on further strengthening the system, making it more resilient to crisis and enhancing the WTO's relevance rather than merely discussing the current situation and the emergency measures taken at the national level. The most important task for the WTO was to prevent the current crisis to worsen further by trade conflict and unjustified restrictions with indefinite duration especially unilateral measures based on non-commercial grounds. Members should work collectively in curbing protectionism – to which the WTO provided the most adequate forum. As such, maintaining the WTO's effectiveness including through its reform and restoring its two-tier dispute settlement function was of utmost important.

1.154. In the current environment, greater systemic transparency of trade regimes was as relevant as ever. Russia urged all Members to actively use their respective monitoring mechanisms established by the WTO which proved to be effective and well-functioning, and to timely submit information regarding trade-related measures. The task to improve transparency of the trade regime should be an essential pillar of WTO reform. In line with that approach, Russia had put forward an initiative on the transparency of applied tariffs and looked forward to its further incorporation in the WTO practice. Another major task in fighting the negative effects of COVID-19 was restoring global value and supply chains while preserving the stability of markets and availability of goods for consumers. To that aim, Members should focus on how to further cut cost for economic operators involved in global value chains.

1.155. Members should support economic sectors that had been most affected by the pandemic. Concerted efforts aimed at facilitating import and trade as well as border measures were strongly encouraged. Full implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by all Members had to be ensured and promoted. However, in reality, business did not only need a clear and predictable trade environment but also adequate and up-to-date rules. Members should accelerate their collective engagement in the negotiating tracks such as e-commerce, investment facilitation and MSMEs. New rules in those spheres should be multilateral – common for all participants of world trade. Russia stressed the urgency of prioritising the work on MSMEs in the WTO taking into account that the crisis had affected MSMEs to the greatest extent and that most Members including Russia had taken a number of measures to support the sector.

1.156. Another key priority to ensure stability and predictability of the global economic situation should be the reduction of trade distorting domestic support in agriculture. That was important both from the economic and systemic point of view. Russian initiatives in that area deserved further elaboration. The inability to hold face to face meetings should not be an excuse for Members' inaction. They should maximise the use of virtual formats to continue discussions in all areas of the organization's ongoing work. Russia supported the proposal by the Group of Latin American Countries as had been mentioned by Argentina and its co-sponsors in their statement. Russia likewise supported the idea of holding a special meeting of the General Council at the end of the year which could formalise the agreements reached so far on certain negotiating areas primarily on fisheries subsidies, investment facilitation, MSMEs and disciplines on domestic regulation in services.

1.157. The representative of Hong Kong, China said that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important for Members to join hands to tackle the crisis collectively under the multilateral trading system. It was also timely to remind themselves that the WTO had a central role to play in enhancing transparency of trade measures, preventing disruptions to the global supply chain and facilitating international trade. Members' concerted efforts in that regard would be critical to the fight against the pandemic and to a speedy recovery of the global economy. In that spirit, Hong Kong, China was pleased to be a co-sponsor of the Switzerland-led Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System circulated in document WT/GC/212. Hong Kong, China reiterated its support for the rules-based multilateral trading system and the WTO and would continue to work together with other Members constructively during those uncertain and challenging times.

1.158. The representative of Oman noted that, like all other Members, Oman was in the middle of its fight against COVID-19 – which required consolidated efforts by all Government Bodies resulting in shifting government resources from other projects to focus on handling COVID-19. Oman was facing two major challenges that the government had to deal with: a sharp drop in oil prices and COVID-19. Both were putting pressure on its resources. All sectors of its economy were affected by

those circumstances. Despite all the challenges, the government continued to function using all possible means relying mainly in technology. Oman had to resort to some temporary emergency restrictive measures as well as some easing measures to deal with COVID-19. Those measures would be notified once it had managed to solve the difficulties it faced with coordination with different government bodies due to the lockdown in the country which had not yet been relaxed.

1.159. The current situation did not provide the right environment for Members to commit themselves to any obligation that could be permanent in nature. Published studies and reports predicted that the impact of COVID-19 on world economy would require a new thinking on trade liberalization in agriculture, services, TRIPS and public health, global value chains, e-commerce, digital economy, digital divide, among others. As Members did not know yet how long the pandemic would last, many economies would face difficulties to recover due to financial obstacles. The WTO's role was very important in those challenging times to ensure predictability, stability and coordinated and coherent global response. Oman urged Members to reflect on the challenges that they and others were facing and to show solidarity with those most affected by the pandemic.

1.160. The representative of Benin noted that, like other Members, Benin was facing COVID-19 which had shaken its existence. Benin had engaged very early on in its response to COVID-19 through actions taken at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels. Following the announcement of the first case of patients with COVID-19 in Benin, preventive measures had been taken by the Beninese authorities to limit the risks of spread and to ensure the treatment and follow-up of the cases identified. As of 14 May, Benin had recorded a total of 339 confirmed cases, with 254 people still being treated, 83 recoveries, and 2 deaths. The crisis had affected several sectors of economic and commercial activity in the Republic of Benin with the borders closed and the population confined.

1.161. Declines in production and trade in goods and services had had serious consequences for households, agricultural producers, transporters, breeders, fishermen, artisans, businesses and the tourism sector, among others, in addition to the human suffering caused by the virus. A general slowdown in the production sectors and business activities had led to a considerable drop in the incomes of economic operators, citizens and the State. Access to food, medicines and other medical products and equipment should be facilitated and promoted. In the dramatic and complex situation experienced during the health, economic, social and humanitarian crisis, preserving and promoting multilateralism, including in the field of international trade, remained a fundamental objective.

1.162. It was important to manage the induced shocks, and the effects, in the short, medium and long-term, and to ensure the effective implementation of the flexibilities existing in the WTO Agreements, and to foresee new ones which would correspond to the exceptional circumstances called for by the consequences of the pandemic. More specifically, Benin recommended the extension on COVID-19 related grounds of the exemptions contained in the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, flexibilities relating to restrictions on imports and exports, the flexibility provisions of the Agreements on SPS and on TBT and other standards as well as those relating to the balance of payments and debt situation of developing and LDC Members.

1.163. The Cotton and Textile sector, which was also strongly impacted in the activities of the production cycle and the marketing of cotton and its derived products, deserved special attention. Benin recommended that a safety net be set up for the benefit of agricultural producers, MSMEs, fishermen and breeders, craftsmen, among others, to protect the jobs and resources from those activities. Benin urged all actors in the chain of management of the pandemic, at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels, to increase efforts and initiatives to build, in an effective and sustainable manner, resilience and revival of economic, commercial and social activities.

1.164. The representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia highly appreciated the efforts of the organization in the fight against COVID-19 which did not recognize any borders and could only be overcome through coordinated action. Members should spare no efforts to protect lives, bring the pandemic under control, safeguard people's jobs and incomes and support the global economy during and after this phase. As the current holder of the G20 Presidency, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had recently held several extraordinary meetings including the Extraordinary Virtual Meeting of the G20 Leaders held on 26 March. In their statement, the G20 Leaders had agreed to present a united front against this common threat. In line with the G20 Leaders' Meeting and in response to

the COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi Arabia had also held a series of Virtual G20 Ministerial Meetings⁷ to discuss exclusively the COVID-19 impact on global trade and investment, agriculture, digital economy, tourism and energy. Moreover, a second Extraordinary G20 Virtual Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting was organized on 14 May. The Ministerial Statement from the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial meeting was circulated in WT/GC/216.

1.165. The G20 Ministers had endorsed the G20 action to support world trade and investment in response to COVID-19 and committed to continue working with international organizations within their mandates to facilitate investment and flows of essential goods and services. The standout theme across all tracks was to explore G20's response to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic and maintain economic recovery and stability. At the WTO front and to ensure that any trade measures designed to address COVID-19 were targeted, proportionate, temporary without creating unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with a group of WTO Members had endorsed a Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System, the Joint Statement on the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic with Open and Predictable Trade in Agriculture and Food Products and the Joint Statement on Highlighting the Importance of MSMEs in the time of COVID-19. Saudi Arabia had likewise submitted a number of notifications related to COVID-19 to the WTO.

1.166. The representative of China appreciated the work done by the Secretariat during the current period. COVID-19 had brought both short-term and long-term impact. For the short-term impact, measures such as export restrictions had been taken as an immediate response to the outbreak resulting in a shortage of medical supplies in the international market. Similar measures had also been put in place in agricultural and food products. Those measures did not necessarily constitute direct violations of the rules and could be sympathetically understandable. However, how to strengthen collaboration and prevent trade policies from being fragmented through multilateral consultations was something Members should think about. The urgency and necessity to improve notification and enhance transparency were essential during the crisis. According to a Secretariat document in late April, only 39 out of the 72 Members that had adopted COVID-19 related export restriction measures had notified the WTO. In terms of medium and long-term impact, the pandemic had caused some scepticism to the future of economic globalization and multilateral cooperation, and the de-globalization sentiment became even more intense – harming the global economic recovery especially of vulnerable developing Members.

1.167. Some Members had recently taken self-sufficiency as the objective, planning or implementing measures to localise production and bring manufacturing and services back home by providing subsidies and tax deductions, requiring "buy local" and tightening foreign investment review. Global supply chains were shaped by and evolved through their own inherent rules in line with changing circumstances. The government should respect basic economic logic and corporate autonomy in the process. As among the first countries hit by COVID-19, China was grateful for the generous support and assistance provided by the international community. At the same time, China strived to make its own contributions to the global fight against the pandemic. From 1 March to 30 April, China had exported a total of 71.2 billion yuan of anti-pandemic supplies, including 27.8 billion masks, 130 million gowns, 73.41 million testing kits and 49,100 ventilators. China had also shared information on the virus and its treatment through conducting 120 video conferences with more than 160 countries and organizations, sending 21 teams of medical experts to 19 countries, among others. No individual country was able to stand alone in the face of such a global crisis. Only through strengthened collaboration and coordination could they go through difficult times.

1.168. China thereby made three suggestions. First, Members should largely avoid trade restrictions by exercising restraint from erecting trade barriers in responding to the pandemic. If emergency measures were genuinely needed, they should be kept targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, and consistent with WTO rules, including timely notifications. Second, Members should orderly resume the WTO's regular work. Latest means and technologies should be deployed to strengthen communication on how to address the crisis. When the situation would permit, existing WTO negotiations should continue so that the organization's due value in international governance could be further reflected. Third, Members should pay close attention to the difficulties of developing

⁷ The G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Statement dated 30 March 2020 can be found in document WT/L/1089.

and LDC Members, and provide targeted assistance, including especially trade financing, so that they could survive the crisis and continue to advance the industrialization process.

1.169. The representative of the United States said that progress at the WTO, however one would define it, was long fought, hard fought and incremental. Unfortunately, none of those characteristics comported with a fast moving, deadly pandemic. Everyone had had to react quickly to COVID-19 to protect the lives of their citizens which was the most basic responsibility of sovereign governments. While transparency regarding the temporary trade-related measures put in place was important, Members all assumed that, in a public health emergency, they would rightly prioritise the health and safety of their own citizens. He said that the export restrictions enacted by individual EU Member States as the pandemic had spread out from Wuhan and had begun decimating parts of Europe was a reflection of that common understanding. The United States too had imposed temporary export restrictions which it had duly notified at the WTO.

1.170. He further noted that more Americans had been infected with and died from COVID-19 than any other nationality. As of 14 May, the United States had counted over 1.4 million known COVID cases, and nearly 86,000 deaths – a third of the world's reported cases and more than a quarter of the deaths. The United States called for Members' understanding on those urgent matters of life and death which had clear priority over any effort they could undertake at the WTO. At the same time, the United States was fully aware that it was important to bolster the economy, at home and worldwide, as the courageous health professionals and scientists continued their vital work. To that end, the United States had undertaken efforts with the hope that other countries were encouraged to act commensurately.

1.171. As of 1 May, the US Department of State and USAID had pledged more than USD 775 million in COVID specific emergency funding to the world's most at risk countries. Private American businesses, non-profits, charities and individuals had collectively provided nearly USD 4 billion in donations and assistance in addition to government aid. Together, Americans had provided nearly USD 6.5 billion in government and non-government assistance and donations to the global COVID-19 response accounting for nearly 60 percent of global totals. The United States Federal Reserve had taken aggressive actions to support markets, businesses and financial stability at home providing lending up to USD 2.3 trillion to US households and businesses. The Fed had also cut the rate it charged on exchange swaps with central banks for countries all around the world. The United States Congress had appropriated well over USD 3 trillion in economic support, a sum equivalent to 15 percent of US GDP and 3 percent of world GDP.

1.172. He said that all those measures were helping to encourage international financial stability. By supporting American businesses and families, the United States was promoting sustained spending to meet the needs of its citizens and industries which in turn helped keep trade flowing and supported economies around the world. For example, the US Census Bureau reported USD 194 billion in imports of goods and USD 38 billion in imports of services in March – including a USD 9 billion increase in goods imports from the European Union. With respect to the economics of the crisis, the United States was acting with urgency on a large scale and to national and global benefit. It was crucial to continue to investigate the origins of the pandemic and the circumstances that had led to a severe supply shortage of PPEs on the global market as the pandemic's devastating impact became apparent.

1.173. Overdependence on a handful of countries as a source of cheap medical products and supplies had created a strategic vulnerability to the economy. The United States was looking to diversify supply chains and increase manufacturing capacity back home. Once the exigencies of the current crisis subsided, the world's attention would turn to preparing for the next global crisis including how trade policy would factor into that preparation and what role the WTO could have in that global endeavour. With much of the world in the throes of the global pandemic, the United States' primary focus rightly remained on the health and safety of its citizens. But it was hard to ignore the existential crisis in which the WTO found itself. The United States strongly encouraged those interested in creating a more effective, consequential WTO to re-examine US reform proposals including those dealing with market-oriented conditions, S&DT and notification compliance, and to appreciate the positive signals that action on that agenda would send.

1.174. The representative of Ecuador recognized the contribution that the WTO had made to assist Members to withstand the COVID-19 crisis particularly the joint efforts made with other international organizations. Ecuador could likewise not overlook the work that the Secretariat had done to keep

the different WTO Bodies afloat. Ecuador thanked the delegations for their efforts which could be seen in a number of different joint statements on trade in relation to COVID-19 that had been circulated in recent days including WT/GC/208/Rev.1, WT/GC/212 and the document it had co-sponsored circulated in WT/GC/215. Ecuador underscored the importance during the pandemic and post pandemic periods of Members avoiding unnecessary trade restrictive measures. Particularly, they should seek to avoid unjustified restrictions on trade and those that threatened global food supplies and the livelihoods and sustenance of developing countries. Ecuador echoed the calls that other Members had made to hone international methods for facing the crisis in a way that was compatible with WTO rules. Similarly, Ecuador called upon the Members to the extent possible to maintain transparency around the measures they adopted.

1.175. Global trade was pivotal in shoring up Members' economies. The world and particularly developing Members would not be able to rise to the challenge without that. One of the main challenges, perhaps the most pressing one, was the need to build an international response – a coordinated global plan to face the health, economic and social consequences of the crisis. That plan should among other things include the following: rebooting international trade including in services, the ability to obtain fresh produce, reasonable notification periods and focus on developing Members particularly the most vulnerable economies. Members should also seek significant international cooperation to ensure that they could act together to avoid a repeat of that type of crisis in the future. If Members did not tackle those challenges together, a global economic crisis leading to a significant global recession could happen which could last for years. They should therefore work in an inclusive and coordinated manner to shape their shared future. They needed renewed international commitment and solidarity through the multilateral trading system which should be rules-based, transparent, predictable and non-discriminatory with a functioning dispute settlement mechanism. Ecuador supported moving forward with WTO work to facilitate recovery efforts.

1.176. The representative of Turkey said that the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted how interdependent the global economy had become. From risking global value chains to disrupting trade flows, the pandemic had massive implications for international production networks. All global supply chains would not remain the same. Minor restrictions from tariffs to regulatory impediments could result in significant costs on business. Keeping supply chains open especially in critical products would therefore be instrumental to overcome current bottlenecks and to mitigate the impact on the global economy. Many Members including Turkey had adopted policies for the smooth functioning of international trade through lowering tariffs, easing import and export procedures and digitalization of customs procedures. From the start of COVID-19, Turkey had already orchestrated a coordinated action plan domestically and internationally by lowering tariffs on critical medical and food products and taking significant steps in conformity assessment procedures and rules of origin requirements. Turkey had also eased documentation requirements in many customs procedures focused on the implementation of the TFA commitments and had initiated the paperless customs project where all trade-related documents had been transferred to electronic format. Paper document presentations at the border gate had also been terminated.

1.177. Turkey had quickly lifted some export authorization measures on almost all medical supplies and equipment and had set up a website for COVID-19 related measures to inform exporters and importers of all the measures taken in response to the outbreak. Turkey had shown solidarity with the international community by donating essential protective equipment, testing kits and ventilators to countries around the world especially the most vulnerable ones. Trade was not an end in itself but a tool for inclusive prosperity of the people – ensuring them adequate access to essential goods and services. To prevent or relieve critical shortages, Members should adopt responsive policies while respecting the rules that had been negotiated over the years and enshrined in the WTO Agreements. Public health policies and social security systems should not be pursued purely based on commercial interest. In guaranteeing that, the WTO already provided necessary policy space for Members – which should be used carefully in a predictable manner and any measure arising from such use should be transparent, temporary and non-discriminatory.

1.178. The pandemic had shown that all Members were vulnerable regardless of their development level. International cooperation and a coordinated policy response were key to economic recovery and would be critical to prevent long-term economic distrust. Instead of turning inwards, Members should maintain the diverse architecture of global production – helping developing Members to take part in global manufacturing and benefit from global value chains. To minimize the social and economic impact of the pandemic and for an inclusive recovery, the multilateral track should be strengthened and efforts should be redoubled. The WTO should continue to guide Members in

streamlining trade flows and in keeping international trade open. Members should unlock discussions in several areas. Negotiations in agriculture and fisheries should intensify. They should have more discussions on facilitating trade especially in essential goods and accelerate efforts to implement the TFA. They should also take into account the specific needs and conditions of developing and LDC Members. In line with the changing nature of trade with the increasing use of the digital economy, in addition to fostering the discussion, they should also further address the concerns of the developing world in e-commerce. They should likewise consider the importance of devising rules for MSMEs. Turkey remained ready to constructively engage with all Members in that process.

1.179. The representative of Tunisia associated with the statement made by the African Group. The briefing by the Director-General on 17 April revealed the consensus that the crisis was having an enormous impact on global trade following the closure of borders and the near shutting down of all production systems. Members needed to find ways to tackle the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented challenge for the global economy. Protection of global trade and consumption was clearly on a downward trajectory at the global level. A number of Members had taken efforts to counter the effects of the crisis. Their efforts should be supported by increased international cooperation to rise to the challenges that the pandemic had produced. Members should respond to the health crisis and take economic action to bolster resilience and efficiency of production and trading systems so that they could bounce back as quickly as possible.

1.180. Protecting citizens' health and wellbeing was a high priority in all governments – as they ensured the availability of food and essential medicines, medical supplies and similar products. COVID-19 was threatening the food security of millions of people around the world and international trade was key to that as it was necessary for subsistence. Tunisia underscored the importance of ensuring that the international trading system served international development and the global community's ability to respond to the crisis. Members needed to mitigate the consequences of the crisis and to preserve the necessary flexibilities for developing Members to be able to increase their production capacity as a means of countering the pandemic and any future crisis that could arise.

1.181. Intellectual property rights and their protection were pivotal in determining access to medicines, vaccines and diagnostic tools in the medical sphere for a reasonable price. With the lack of such items and their potentially high prices, exceptions for IPR protection were key in certain cases for developing Members as a means of ensuring prevention and treatment of the virus. Within the WTO, Members needed to make a collective effort to support flexibilities and approve the relevant exemptions. They should avoid dispute settlement proceedings against developing Members in those cases and ensure that they had the necessary flexibilities to be able to fight the virus. Certain exemptions were available under the WTO Agreements. Another key issue was technology transfer and Tunisia hoped that Members could have some specific provisions on that.

1.182. Various economic activities would be severely affected by the crisis. Consumption habits would change radically and travel restrictions had been and would continue to be imposed. Tunisia had made significant steps in that regard by taking measures since the detection of the first cases of the virus. For the past five days, no new cases of COVID-19 had been recorded in Tunisia and on 4 May, targeted lockdown had been implemented by the Tunisian Government to ensure that a number of vital sectors could resume their work. Tunisia was more than happy to share its experience with other Members. Due to the importance of resuming economic activity as quickly as possible including international trade as a means of rapidly responding to the needs of the people, Members should coordinate their efforts going beyond the classic methods used in the past. Members had a shared responsibility to make and fulfil that commitment.

1.183. The representative of Thailand associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. As the COVID-19 pandemic regrettably continued to impose negative effects on the well-being of the people around the world and could compound extensive impacts on the global economy. The role of the WTO and its Members was critical in ensuring stable and transparent trade flows that would enable expedited trade and economic recovery. In line with the joint statements and declarations made at various levels, including with ASEAN Member States and APEC, Thailand remained committed to keeping its market open for trade and investment and supported calls for measures adopted in response to the pandemic to be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, not create unnecessary barriers to trade and consistent with WTO rules.

1.184. Thailand shared the concerns of many Members regarding the impacts on global food security and acknowledged the importance of safeguarding against supply and price volatilities. Open

trade that enabled agricultural producers to raise funds to emergencies and food crisis remained the most effective means to ensuring food security. Thailand did not currently have an export restriction measure on agriculture in place and while the preservation of the health and wellbeing of the people was of utmost importance for Members, it was also vital that agricultural trade measures in response to the pandemic were undertaken in a manner that did not adversely impact the smooth and predictable trade flows of agricultural goods and food products.

1.185. In light of the aforementioned views, WTO work should continue in order to ensure that Members were all in the best possible position to make swift economic and trade recovery post COVID-19 pandemic. Most of WTO work had been stalled since the pandemic and it was unclear when physical meetings could be resumed. Members should therefore take a decision or alternate means to continue their work in case of a prolonged inability to hold physical meetings. With flexibility and determination, there were available tools and procedures that they could elaborate to achieve adequate means to take their work forward in those unprecedented circumstances - whether for exchanges of views, negotiations or decision-making. Thailand joined the calls for other Members to organize thematic discussions in relevant WTO Committees to discuss, monitor and reveal measures put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.186. The representative of Canada said that in the period of unprecedented health and economic challenges due to COVID-19, adherence to the rules-based multilateral trading system had never been more important. Trade should remain open and predictable and WTO disciplines should remain relevant and valuable. The work of the Secretariat had proven invaluable to help understand the various COVID-19 trade related measures implemented by Members. In addition, the comprehensive reports provided by the Secretariat had contributed to Members' better understanding of the situation as they began to take gradual steps on their path towards recovery. International coordination and cooperation in response to COVID-19 was key to help Members address the health and economic crisis and support the global economic recovery guided by the SDGs. Canada recognized the unique challenges faced by developing and LDC Members and reiterated the importance of avoiding disruptions to trade that could harm their ability to access essential goods.

1.187. Concerning the Ottawa Group actions in response to the crisis, on 8 May, the Ottawa Group Permanent Representatives had met virtually to discuss impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the WTO work as well as potential Ottawa Group engagement with business groups. On 13 May, the Ottawa Group Vice Ministers had met virtually to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 and actions that could be taken to safeguard the multilateral trading system in the period ahead of them. Vice Ministers had discussed several areas where they believed leadership would be needed at the WTO and the importance for Members to quickly take action to combat a rise in protectionism. That had included possible forward looking work to ensure that appropriate WTO rules existed to address future crises.

1.188. For example, a potential plurilateral on medical goods that facilitated trade and prevented disruption in supply chains, making progress on fisheries subsidies and continuing the work on the Joint Statement Initiatives especially on e-commerce had also been identified as important areas of work going forward. Vice Ministers further indicated support for the WTO continuing to play a role in monitoring and making information available on trade restrictions and other measures taken by governments in response to the pandemic. They had also had an opportunity to exchange views on business engagement, COVID-19 impacts on global trade and business community expectations for the WTO with the Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce. A virtual Ottawa Group was planned for 8 June to continue discussions on the current challenges and to provide further direction on priorities.

1.189. During the informal Heads of Delegation meeting in April, Canada had noted that it stood ready to engage and would fully participate in the work ahead. Since then, Canada had worked with its global counterparts to facilitate the cross-border movement of essential goods and services. Canada worked closely with many Members and had taken action to ensure agriculture and agri-food supply chains remained open, connected and predictable in response to COVID-19. On 22 April, Canada had circulated a joint statement with 23 signatories who represented two-thirds of global agriculture exports and over 60 percent of global agricultural imports entitled "Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic with Open and Predictable Trade in Agriculture and Food Products". The statement had been re-circulated with five additional co-sponsors⁸. Canada continued to reach out

⁸ The revision can be found in document WT/GC/208/Rev.1. A further revision was circulated in document WT/GC/208/Rev.2.

to Members to join the initiative to keep agriculture trade open and predictable. Canada had also signed on to the Korea-led joint statement that dealt on the call for action from G20 Leaders Summit and the Extraordinary Trade Ministers to ensure global supply chains continued to function.

1.190. In addition, Canada had signed on to the New Zealand and Singapore led Joint Ministerial Statement affirming their commitment to ensuring supply chain connectivity amidst the COVID-19 situation. Canada along with 41 Members had signed a joint statement on 5 May to reinforce their commitment to and support for rules-based multilateral trade at this critical time. Canada had publicly committed not to impose agricultural export restrictions and refrained from implementing unjustified trade barriers on agriculture and agri-food products and key agricultural production inputs; that emergency measures related to essential products designed to tackle COVID-19 would be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with WTO rules and that Canada was committed to refrain from raising new unjustified barriers to investment or to trade in goods and services. Not only had Canada not taken any export restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it had also taken a number of trade facilitative measures which had been notified to the WTO. Canada encouraged all other Members to make similar commitments.

1.191. Members faced a high degree of uncertainty about when regular in-person meetings could resume and the extent to which capital based officials would be able to attend in person. As a result, Canada fully supported using a virtual approach or a hybrid of virtual and face-to-face approaches in order to allow for regular work and negotiations to take place. Canada encouraged Members to look at the actions of their other international institutions to implement creative ways to allow the work to continue in a pragmatic, engaged and meaningful manner.

1.192. The representative of Chinese Taipei noted that, given the unprecedented situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, policy space should be given to Members for the purpose of protecting public health and saving lives. However, any emergency measures taken should be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, without creating unnecessary barriers to trade and should be consistent with WTO rules. Chinese Taipei therefore supported, along with other Members, Canada's initiative on collectively "responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with open and predictable trade in agriculture and food". Chinese Taipei urged Members to refrain from introducing unnecessary export restrictions that could have adverse effects on global food security. Chinese Taipei also supported the pledge made in a recent statement by APEC Trade Ministers to fight the COVID-19 pandemic together. Furthermore, Chinese Taipei was totally committed to facilitating the flow of essential goods and services across borders – such as medicines, medical supplies, agricultural and food products – and to minimizing any disruption to the global supply chain to avoid undermining the efforts to secure public health.

1.193. Concerning the serious damage that the pandemic had caused to Members' economies, the people and businesses, and in particular to MSMEs, Chinese Taipei fully recognized the importance of MSMEs to economic and trade growth, as well as to employment. Chinese Taipei commended fellow Members on the actions they were taking to address the special challenges faced by MSMEs and their workers at this difficult time. Chinese Taipei would continue to support the constructive work undertaken by the MSMEs Group in the WTO. Chinese Taipei also thanked the Secretariat for compiling all the COVID-19 related information and making it easily accessible on the WTO website. Chinese Taipei was willing to help other Members, and continued to do so, to combat the pandemic by sharing experiences and medical supplies, and providing technical assistance. Chinese Taipei welcomed further cooperation on such matters and would continue its efforts, in cooperation with other Members, to restore the momentum of WTO negotiations and to strengthen the WTO's functions and influence in global trade. Working together, Members could overcome the crisis and the WTO had a crucial role in leading the way to a robust resumption of the global economy.

1.194. The representative of Malaysia associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN and took note of all statements issued by Members on COVID-19. Malaysia thanked all the front-liners who had worked tirelessly during this challenging time. As the Chair of APEC 2020, Malaysia shared the Statement by APEC Trade Ministers on COVID-19 dated 5 May circulated in document WT/GC/213. The statement demonstrated APEC Economies' commitment to collectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic while undertaking the necessary steps to remedy the health and its economic impact. The statement had also highlighted the importance of facilitating the flow of essential goods and services such as medicines, medical supplies and equipment, agriculture and food products and other supplies across borders as well as minimizing disruptions to the global supply chains. The statement also acknowledged that any emergency measures designed to address

COVID-19 challenges should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and should not create unnecessary barriers to trade, and consistent with WTO rules. Malaysia was also pleased to co-sponsor the COVID-19 papers related to trade in agriculture and food products and MSMEs. Malaysia hoped that Members would be able to get through those hard times together.

1.195. The representative of India said that the crisis was a powerful reminder of interconnectedness and the need for a coordinated, global strategy to overcome the unprecedented public health situation. If the virus would not be wiped out everywhere, it would not be wiped out anywhere. In formulating a response, it was critical to bear in mind that the negative effects of the pandemic would be felt widely, but unevenly. The strain on economic, food and livelihood security would disproportionately impact developing and LDC Members with large populations and limited resources. Concerning the role that the multilateral trading system could play in combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, India acknowledged the importance of coordinating the global response in a way that avoided unnecessary disruption in the flow of vital medical supplies, food and other goods and services across borders. India had been playing a proactive role in ensuring the availability of vital drugs such as hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol across the globe. India had donated and exported critical medical supplies to more than 120 countries and had also dispatched teams of Indian doctors to Nepal, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Kuwait.

1.196. India was committed to the G20 Leaders' statement that emergency measures taken in the wake of the pandemic should be "targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary". Members were free to reduce customs duties on imports of certain medical or agricultural products to zero, on a voluntary basis, if it served their health and food security objectives. However, the narrative pushed by some Members to seek permanent tariff liberalization on a range of products including cut flowers, ice cream and wine, to respond to a temporary crisis, appeared to be a thinly-veiled bid to use the crisis as an opportunity to gain market access for their exporters. Developing Members seeking to shore up manufacturing capacity in medical products would require tariff protection for their nascent domestic industry. Further, job losses in many service sectors had to be compensated elsewhere. Therefore, India, like many other developing Members, could not agree to permanent tariff concessions and a dilution of the tariff bindings that they had paid for in the Uruguay Round.

1.197. There had also been a growing narrative that sought to prohibit the use of export restrictions on medical and agricultural products. Developing countries being unable to match the deep pockets of buyers in developed countries would see those products vanish in times of shortage. Export restrictions were a WTO-consistent policy tool that was important to prevent critical domestic shortages of food, medicine and equipment. Those export restrictions should be temporary and imposed responsibly taking into account the dependence of others. A more effective and lasting way of ensuring food and livelihood security of the most vulnerable and promoting sustainable agriculture trade would be by agreeing to eliminate the historic asymmetries in the Agreement on Agriculture. If Members were serious about trade-related measures aimed at combating COVID-19 then a useful starting point would be to enable the use of TRIPS flexibilities to ensure access to essential medicines, treatments and vaccines at affordable prices. If additional temporary flexibilities were required to guarantee that fundamental objective, so be it. Along with the flow of vital goods, the pandemic had also highlighted the need for ensuring easier cross-border movement of medical professionals and need for multilateral initiatives in that respect.

1.198. The COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the shift to a digital economy and had thrown into sharp relief the gaping digital divide between developed and developing Members. Almost half the world's population did not have access to high speed broadband depriving them of access to virtual platforms, telemedicine, distance education and e-payments – emphasising the urgent need to build the capacity of developing and LDC Members in areas like digital skills and broadband infrastructure rather than negotiating binding rules on e-commerce, which would freeze the non-level playing field against their interests. The economic hardship and other negative repercussions of COVID-19 made carrying on with negotiations in a business-as-usual format untenable. As a responsible Member, India stood ready to work constructively with other Members to protect human life and restore trade, global economic growth and jobs. Having agonised in the last few months of the pandemic at how people had been dying, Members should urgently turn their attention to alleviating the terrible conditions in which so many were forced to live especially in the developing world.

1.199. The representative of Indonesia associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. The COVID-19 pandemic had become a pressing global issue where all Members were struggling to contain. The battle had not reached its finish line since the global number of new cases was still

growing. According to the latest global forecast by WTO economists, global trade was expected to witness a steep fall in 2020. It would undoubtedly have more impact on the developing and LDC Members which had huge populations to protect from the ravaging pandemic. The role of the WTO was more prominent now, more than ever. Since developing Members such as Indonesia were stretching their public health system, the need to ensure equitable and affordable access to health had never been more demanding. The need for greater policy space was logical bearing in mind the urgent matters of life and death. Full utilization of TRIPS flexibilities such as compulsory licensing or other possible means under the WTO rulebook could be taken to ensure adequacy in health capacity to combat the pandemic and to sustain people's livelihood.

1.200. The WTO's support in using the WTO Agreements or in easing up WTO rules that could pose barriers to Members' effort in having the capacity to overcome the pandemic had become even more important. Within the unprecedented circumstances, the WTO had played a significant role in rescuing millions of lives. At the same time, several trade measures had been proposed by Members to facilitate the flow of goods and services. Calls for enhanced transparency and elimination of export restrictions on essential goods such as food, medicines and medical devices had also been made. Developing Members with large populations had a specific set of problems to address particularly their livelihood priorities amid the COVID-19 health crisis – making it difficult to envisage any enhanced commitments to pursue far reaching liberalization measures to be made by developing Members during this period.

1.201. The free flow of agriculture products should be in line with the ability of Members to provide food security for its people and ensure the most vulnerable among them could meet their demand for food. Reassessing trade in agriculture during the crisis would also have serious risk that agriculture products would only go to those with greater purchasing power leaving vulnerable Members behind. While the overall impact of the pandemic was beyond comprehension, the crisis was temporary. Hence, any action to be taken in the organization in the context of the battle against the pandemic should be tailored accordingly in order to ensure the fulfilment of Members' urgent needs. Indonesia stood ready to cooperate and support the WTO in its efforts to play its key role in supporting Members in collectively overcoming the pandemic.

1.202. The representative of South Africa said that COVID-19 was an unprecedented crisis. The economic activity globally had plummeted, unemployment had soared, inequality and poverty were expected to rise to record levels and up to 60 million people were expected to live in extreme poverty. At worst, South Africa was likely to lose 7 million jobs, adding to a 29.1% unemployment rate before the crisis. COVID-19 was likely to dwarf the financial crisis in economic damage from which the global economy had never fully recovered from and would change the socioeconomic landscape. Changes would therefore be needed in the multilateral trading system to promote more inclusive economic growth and development. Governments were working to calculate the magnitude of the shock and sharpening their tools not only to save lives but also to save economies from collapse. A new study by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa found that 83,000 to 190,000 people in Africa could die of COVID-19 and 29 million to 44 million could get infected in the first year of the pandemic if containment measures failed.

1.203. Like other Members, South Africa had implemented measures aimed at promoting public health in accordance with the exceptions available in the WTO which included the introduction of an export permit for essential medical products to fight COVID-19. Trade facilitative measures had also been implemented such as the submission of electronic SPS certificates. In areas where South Africa needed to facilitate access to essential medical supplies, a rebate had been issued on a temporary basis based on the needs of the country. Those had been practical measures to address practical and urgent needs. At the G20 Ministers meeting, the South African Minister had made the point that while globalisation brought benefits, the crisis had also pointed to the risks of over-dependence on global supply chains. South Africa supported the multilateral, rules-based system as a means to build more resilient, diversified global supply chains. International cooperation would need to be intensified. South Africa valued it and wanted to be a strong and active partner. During this period, Members should avoid the temptation to pursue other agendas and narrow commercial interests.

1.204. South Africa could not agree to proposals for global rulemaking that limited Members' policy options to respond to the crisis, enhance their preparedness for future crises and pursue their plans for economic recovery. It was not advisable to make binding decisions in a policy environment that was manifestly uncertain including on tariffs and export restrictions which were legal in the WTO under Art XI of GATT and Art 12 of Agreement on Agriculture. Members that needed to temporarily

reduce tariffs to ensure access to essential supplies were free to do so in accordance with their priorities. Members should preserve policy tools including tariffs to address job losses, revive industries and build new sectors and capabilities. One-size-fits-all approaches were not always appropriate. Measures implemented by Members should be targeted, temporary, transparent and proportionate and should not create unnecessary barriers to trade and should take into account the needs of net importers. Transparency was important especially under the current circumstances, authoritative notification by Members themselves was what would promote access to reliable information on measures.

1.205. The crisis had revealed strategic vulnerabilities and Members should expect more efforts to diversify supply chains and promote domestic manufacturing at least in some sectors. Some Members were calling for strategic autonomy suggesting a need for policy flexibility and signalling that a rebalancing between global rules and national economic development imperatives was necessary and possible. Importantly, it had highlighted the importance of the role of governments in the economy not only to close the gaps and address market failure but to regulate in the public interest. South Africa called for a temporary umbrella Peace Clause on all government measures implemented in the context of COVID-19. Its parameters could be an outcome of constructive discussions among Members. An effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic required timely access to affordable medical products including diagnostic kits, PPE and ventilators. In the present context of global emergency, it was important for Members to work together to ensure that IP rights such as patents, industrial designs, copyrights and trade secrets did not create barriers to the scaling-up of research, development, manufacturing and supply of medical products essential to combat COVID-19.

1.206. Developing Members were going to be disproportionately affected by the crisis, especially African countries. Members should recognize the close interrelationship between finance, debt and trade. The large gap between the international support currently on offer and financing needs of developing Members would therefore not only weaken the effectiveness of the immediate response to the crisis but would also delay the global economic recovery. South Africa reiterated the urgent need for strengthening S&DT provisions which were critical to promote public health, accelerate industrialization, upgrade and modernise manufacturing, promote technology transfer and close the digital divide to promote an inclusive digital economy. The G-90 proposals articulated those aspects yet Members had not been willing to engage. The pandemic highlighted the importance of S&DT for developing and LDC Members and that matter should be taken up as a matter of priority.

1.207. The multilateral trading system should support production-led growth, jobs and structural transformation. It should address trade distorting domestic support as a matter of urgency so as to promote resilience in agriculture trade, food security and deliver on SDGs. Multilateral rules should enable Members to respond to their specific development challenges. The trading system should rediscover the careful balance struck in the Preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement which stated in its opening that the Parties recognized that their relations in the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, and expanding the production of and trade in goods and services. South Africa supported the multilateral, rules-based system as a means to build a more diversified global, regional and national manufacturing and productive capacity for trade.

1.208. The representative of Myanmar associated with the statement to be made by ASEAN. Myanmar shared the concerns about the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the socio-economic situation globally and recognized the importance of coordinated response to stabilise the economy and protect human life. As part of the Joint Ministerial Statement on Supply Chain connectivity, Myanmar stressed the importance of the central and indispensable role of the WTO and affirmed its commitment to ensure openness and connectivity of supply chains, trade facilitation of essential and medical goods and removal of trade restrictive measures.

1.209. While working together towards a predictable and stable trade environment to support global recovery, Myanmar urged international organizations and stakeholders to help MSMEs which were the most vulnerable and affected entities to overcome the challenges all Members were facing and improve their access to trade finance and information. As a co-sponsor of the Joint Statement on MSMEs, Myanmar emphasised the importance of working together to overcome the crisis. As had been stated in the LDC Statement, Myanmar requested Members and other international organizations to support LDCs in their economic recovery as a result of the pandemic.

1.210. The pandemic had shocked and had overwhelmed even resource-rich countries. The challenge it posed to LDCs like Myanmar could be unmanageable. Despite limitations in its resources and healthcare capacity, Myanmar had so far been able to keep the virus under control. As the WHO representative in Myanmar had put it, the situation in Myanmar remained manageable. As of 14 May, Myanmar had 181 total cases with six deaths and 84 recoveries. Nobody could say for sure which direction it would go in the next few months. It depended on how Members handled the pandemic. The Myanmar Government's efforts had a twin objective: to contain the outbreak of COVID-19 and to mitigate its impact on the economy. Myanmar had also mobilised the strength of its people as well as the support of friends and partners in its fight against the pandemic.

1.211. The Myanmar Government had set up a COVID-19 Fund for combatting the virus. As a result, there had been an outpouring of support in cash, kind and services from domestic well-wishers, volunteers, development partners and the international community including UN Agencies. Myanmar thanked all of its development partners for their assistance. Myanmar had set up measures to contain the virus by banning all entertainment, public gatherings and religious activities and by launching intensive public awareness campaigns on health guidelines. In responding to the pandemic, Myanmar called on Members to ensure that their measures be temporary, non-trade restrictive and should cause minimum disruption in regional and global travel and supply chains.

1.212. On its part, announcements had been made for the temporary adjournment of the new export licensing on rice from late March to the end of April with the view to balance local protection and consumption needs to ensure food security and to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The implementation of the new export licensing measure had been resumed starting from 1 May 2020. Myanmar reaffirmed its commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system and assured to abide by its rules in the context of its trade relations to foster international trade and development. With the enhanced solidarity and involvement of the international community, Members could overcome the pandemic. Myanmar expressed its deep appreciation to the Director-General for his continued valuable contribution in strengthening the WTO and the multilateral trading system.

1.213. The representative of Fiji, on behalf of the Pacific Group, supported the statements made by the ACP and the LDCs. Like many other Members, members of the Pacific Group were NFIDCs and depended heavily on imported food, medicines and medical equipment. Members of the Pacific Group and other small, island developing States were not only grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic but also with other threats such as climate change with four members of the Pacific Group facing the destruction of category 5 tropical cyclone Harold in the midst of their COVID-19 response. Any export restriction measures at this stage only exacerbated the situation of the members of the Pacific Group thus compromising their ability to provide the necessities to their communities. The Pacific Group therefore relied on keeping global supply chains working and urged Members to exercise utmost restraint in implementing measures to restrict their exports on essential products.

1.214. For its part, the Pacific Group was doing what it could to maintain production and export of canned tuna for people across the globe during uncertain times. Many Members recognized that additional facilitation was needed to accelerate trade in critical products particularly pharmaceuticals and medical equipment. So it was no surprise to see a wide range of notifications on SPS and TBT. The Pacific Group was however often reliant on its trading partners to police international quality standards since its own quality infrastructure was incomplete. The Pacific Group urged Members to take a balanced approach on the issue. When it came to the supply of medical equipment, both speed and quality were critical. The Pacific Group also thanked those Members who had provided timely notifications of the new measures that had been necessary to respond to the pandemic. That truly was an important transparency mechanism which helped the global trading system to adjust to trade exchange. The Pacific Group encouraged Members that were yet to notify new measures to do so promptly but clarity was also vital. The Pacific Group encouraged all Members to make notifications as explicit and as accessible as they could.

1.215. The Pacific Group took note of Members' need to take exceptional measures to provide stimulus to manage the economic impact of COVID-19 but they should also be mindful not to allow some of those measures to become the new normal. Members should ensure that those measures did not last longer than necessary and try to minimize the unintended effects they had on the competitiveness of companies in small developing countries where similar support could not be provided. The world was not as prepared for COVID-19 as it would have been. The future agenda of the WTO would need to do its part to address gaps in the multilateral trading system that had been

highlighted by the crisis. For example, serious thought would need to be devoted in areas such as public stockholding, export restrictions and TRIPS flexibilities.

1.216. The pandemic was unprecedented and had established a new paradigm shift in their economies and lives. The situation in fact tested the resilience and inclusivity of the WTO and its Agreements. Members should not therefore be too hasty in their response to impose restrictions and other measures without careful assessment of its consequences especially on small and vulnerable Members. Members needed to review the situation and put forth measures that ensured the sustainability and inclusivity of the multilateral institution that had withstood the test of time. The Pacific Group was also saddened by the planned departure of the Director-General. With his openness, inclusiveness and encouragement, small Members like those in the Pacific Group were emboldened to add their voice and actively participate in the WTO. The Pacific Group commended him for his achievements during his seven-year service to the WTO.

1.217. The representative of Ukraine said that the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic had once again highlighted the need for coordinated actions in response to global crises and revealed deficiencies and lacunae in the existing rules and disciplines governing international trade which played a pivotal role in ensuring global food security. Despite lessons learnt from previous global crises and adequate supplies of staple foods on international markets, Ukraine had recently witnessed a disturbing number of export restrictions imposed on agricultural products by Members including large exporters of agricultural commodities. Such export restrictive measures, even those which could be justified under WTO rules, disrupted regional and global supply chains, reduced incentives to produce agricultural commodities, triggered increases in prices, caused price volatility, led to food shortages and ultimately jeopardised global food security.

1.218. The COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated that the existing WTO rules which provided for flexibilities necessary to respond to emergency situations by means of imposing export restrictions lacked transparency requirements and disciplines needed to mitigate negative effects of such trade restrictive measure on importing Members and to avoid supply chain disruptions. The nature of existing WTO notification obligations on export restrictions including the scope and timeframes did not reflect present-day needs and did not provide Members with comprehensive, complete and timely information which was particularly valuable during times of crisis and indispensable for making well-informed decisions. Ukraine commended the efforts of international organizations aimed at enhancing transparency through ensuring compliance with the existing notification obligations and information sharing and pledges made by Members to refrain from imposing agriculture export restrictions and to ensure availability of updated and accurate information on levels of food production, consumption, stocks and prices including through existing international mechanisms.

1.219. In the absence of reliable, timely and comprehensive market information, uncertainties in agricultural markets would persist bringing about new unjustified export restrictions, panic buying and hoarding as the lack of information undermined the ability of governments, traders, producers and consumers to make informed decisions. Having adequate information was critical for governments and international organizations for conducting proper analysis and assessment with a view to identifying and developing concerted actions to be taken to avoid or resolve disruptions to global supply chains. Ukraine recognized the instrumental role of international commodity organizations and the existing transparency mechanisms in those turbulent times in addressing the current market uncertainties which were likely to have the most damaging impact on low-income countries heavily dependent on food imports.

1.220. Since nowadays three crops – rice, maize and wheat – provided nearly two-thirds of the world's energy intake, information-sharing, analysis and monitoring taking place within the mandate of the International Grains Council was paramount. Enhanced information exchange between the WTO and those organizations could contribute to reducing market uncertainties, avoiding disruptions to the global supply chains and food shortages and ensuring food security. Under the present circumstances, it was necessary (i) to set a specific timeframe for submitting notifications on export restrictions imposed on agricultural products, (ii) to designate an international transparency mechanism for gathering and disseminating all information on production, consumption, stocks, and prices for major agricultural commodities and measures affecting trade in those goods and (iii) to decide on procedures for submission of the information.

1.221. The representative of Viet Nam, on behalf of ASEAN, said that the ASEAN Leaders had issued a declaration circulated in WT/GC/210 concerning the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19 which

had taken place in April. The Declaration provided that ASEAN was deeply saddened by the continuing loss of life and suffering caused by the pandemic. ASEAN conveyed its sympathies to all that had been affected and commended the great contributions by medical professionals, healthcare workers and other frontline personnel. ASEAN appreciated the extensive measures and timely efforts of ASEAN Member States to combat the severe challenges of the pandemic. ASEAN reaffirmed its determination and commitment for further collaboration with the international community to control the threat of COVID-19 while mitigating its adverse impact on people's livelihood, societies and economies. ASEAN Member States remained committed to keeping their markets open for trade and investment and would ensure that their critical infrastructure for trade and trading routes via air, land and seaports remained open.

1.222. ASEAN would preserve supply chain connectivity that provided for trade to continue to ensure the smooth flow of essential goods including medical, food and other essential supplies. ASEAN encouraged the development of post pandemic recovery plans to share lessons learned, restore connectivity, normal business and social activities and prevent potential economic impacts. In line with the latest declaration, the ASEAN Trade and Agricultural Ministers' co-statement was also circulated in document WT/GC/210. ASEAN had resolved to refrain from actions that could create unnecessary inflationary measures or adversely impact on food security intervention and endeavour to ensure the availability of basic goods and commodities. ASEAN continued to address non-tariff measures particularly those that impacted the smooth flow of goods and services in supply chains and refrain from imposing new and unnecessary non-tariff measures in accordance with the rights and obligations under the WTO. ASEAN extended its appreciation to Switzerland and other Friends of the System for the Joint Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System circulated in WT/GC/212.

1.223. On behalf of Viet Nam, Viet Nam reiterated its commitment for strengthening the multilateral trading system and emphasised the necessity and importance of international cooperation especially during those challenging times. Viet Nam had been strengthening collaboration with ASEAN, APEC Member States and the international community from the very beginning and during the pandemic. Viet Nam was pursuing a two-fold strategy of controlling the pandemic while ensuring social stability and economic roles. Viet Nam maintained an open market, facilitated trade, sustained supply and production channels, retained jobs, prioritised support to people and businesses suffering from the impact of COVID-19 especially MSMEs and promoted growth. Viet Nam therefore co-sponsored the Statement on Highlighting the Importance of MSMEs in the time of COVID-19 circulated in document WT/GC/215. Viet Nam supported the resumption of exchange of views and negotiations in the WTO for more coordinated action to cope with the unprecedented situation.

1.224. The representative of Cambodia associated with the statements made by ASEAN and the LDCs and expressed concern over the COVID-19 pandemic which had rapidly and substantially affected not only the health sector but also other sectors such as tourism, trade and finance, industries and the livelihood of people around the world. Cambodia expressed its deepest condolences to the governments and families for the deaths caused by COVID-19. Cambodia thanked Switzerland and other Friends of the System for the Joint Statement on COVID-19 and the Multilateral Trading System. Like other Members, Cambodia had put in place some preventive measures to combat the pandemic. In collaboration with partner countries and international organizations such as the WHO, Cambodia remained committed to keep its country open for trade and investment even during those challenging times. In responding to COVID-19 and to secure food stocks in Cambodia, the Cambodian Government had introduced a temporary export ban on rice which would be lifted on 20 May 2020.

1.225. Several Members had also introduced some restrictive measures during the pandemic. While recognizing Members' rights and obligations under the WTO Agreements and to safeguard their people, society and economy, Members should refrain from unilateral action that could disrupt cross-border trade and other economic activities; by-pass to impose export prohibitions or restrictions on medical products and supplies and some basic food products which could impact the poor; avoid discrimination; support each other by sharing experiences, information and technology and by providing financial resources and find out in advance some concrete ways to restore the economy and society especially of the LDCs after the pandemic. The Government of Cambodia continuously committed itself to collaborate with other Members and the international community to minimize the risk and to combat the spread of COVID-19.

1.226. The representative of Burkina Faso, on behalf of the C-4, the LDCs and the 36 African Country Cotton and Cotton Product Producers and/or Exporters, associated with the statements made by the African Group, the LDCs, the ACP and the G-33. Among the dramatic consequences of the pandemic were the loss of human lives, the slowdown of economic activity, the fall in wages and the increase in unemployment. To address the unprecedented health crisis and its economic and social repercussions, several Members had put in place exceptional measures. While some measures helped to effectively combat the spread of the pandemic and save lives, others created barriers to cross-border trade in essential medical and food products. If COVID-19 would also affect the agricultural raw materials sector, it would largely penalise the cotton sector. The closure of borders, the slowdown in the activities of the textile industry and the closure of clothing businesses in many countries following lockdown measures had created new difficulties for the cotton sector in addition to those related to the effects of trade-distorting domestic support. Between March and April 2020, world consumption of cotton lint had fallen by 6.4% while cotton prices had fallen by 26.1% between January and April 2020. During the same period, imports and world cotton exports had fallen by 6.6% and 6.8% respectively.

1.227. The strong disruptions in the productive activities of the cotton sector during the pandemic jeopardised in the short and in the medium term the health, jobs and incomes of farmers in African countries particularly in LDCs. In C-4 countries, on average, 70% of the fibre produced in 2020 was blocked in factories, in transit or in ports, and exposed to the sun and bad weather with the immediate effects of loss of quality and additional costs. The payment of producers being conditioned on the sale of cotton had the direct consequence of destitution, over-indebtedness and the risk of famine for millions of people. Faced with those difficulties, the C-4 urged Members to lift all restrictive trade measures to facilitate the supply of essential and medical goods and of food and the export of agricultural commodities particularly cotton which remained one of the main sources of income and employment for several LDCs. As the export earnings from cotton were essential to the economic recovery of those countries, the C-4 urged the Secretariat to seek with the C-4 and other concerned Members the responses needed to build resilience and revitalise the cotton and textile sector. The Aid for Trade initiative and the EIF would have to further support the economic recovery of Members especially the LDCs. For a more productive interaction with capitals, Members should hold face-to-face meetings on cotton while taking into account the global evolution of the pandemic.

1.228. The representative of the Maldives said that for small island developing States and small and vulnerable economies like the Maldives driven largely by the tourism industry and heavily reliant on imports, the lockdown on COVID-19 pandemic had been a complete lockdown on the economy resulting in huge challenges. The Government of Maldives had taken several policy measures to defeat COVID-19. The Maldives had closed its borders, had stepped up healthcare response and had launched economic stimulus and relief packages to help income losses. Some of the economic initiatives included facilitating trade by ensuring smooth flow of goods and minimizing disruptions on supply under restrictive measures, price controls on food items and exemptions of import duties on essential goods. The Maldives had also launched a loan scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises with low interest and easier repayment period. Its efforts to build back better by working towards a more resilient economy was also in progress.

1.229. The Government of Maldives was collaborating with the private sector to lessen the economic impact on the average citizen during the pandemic. The Maldives had been able to implement those measures with generous bilateral, regional and multilateral assistance. The Maldives thanked them all and highlighted that export restrictions on medical supplies and essential medical equipment, as well as essential food items were impacting severely on the COVID-19 response strategies of countries such as the Maldives. The Maldives recognized with appreciation the bilateral initiatives at that crucial time to facilitate trade and food security. The rules-based multilateral trading system needed to continue to guide trade facilitation and assure trade measures were targeted, transparent and proportional – in short, WTO compliant. The global pandemic required a coordinated global effort to address the extraordinary situation. Global trade was an important element of the global response to COVID-19 and the WTO played a key role for the benefit of all.

1.230. The representative of Zimbabwe associated with the statements made by the African Group and the ACP. Members were meeting under circumstances different from those they had two and a half months ago and had witnessed massive disruption to the work of the WTO as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Zimbabwe had a TPR scheduled for 25-27 March but was postponed as Switzerland had started to implement restrictive measures due to the pandemic. Zimbabwe stood ready to go through with the process once the situation would allow. Zimbabwe took its obligations

under the WTO very seriously. In that regard and in accordance with their obligations on transparency and disclosure, on 16 April, the Government of Zimbabwe had notified the WTO on its trade-related measures enacted in response to COVID-19. Those measures were contained in the respective instrument 88-2020 which was aimed at waiving import duty on essential goods imported for the purpose of combatting COVID-19.

1.231. Amid COVID-19, Members were witnessing heightened protective tendencies and the resort to export restrictions on certain medicines and PPEs, among others. While those interventions could be understandable given the current circumstances, the export restrictions should be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary and should be removed once the COVID-19 pandemic had receded. On the proposals advocating for tariff and market liberalization in the context of the current crisis, Zimbabwe cautioned against adopting binding rules during a crisis and instead advised that Members hurried slowly in any negotiations on new binding commitments. Members' preoccupation at the moment was to protect and support the more vulnerable among them. In those difficult times, the more vulnerable Members should not be pressured to make the difficult choice between saving lives and breaching their economies by trying to meet burdensome trade commitments. In view of the unusual circumstances, Zimbabwe proposed the adoption of a Peace Clause or Moratorium which would protect Members from litigation in the DSB or otherwise extraordinary but justified measures implemented to mitigate the health and economic consequences of COVID-19.

1.232. Access to affordable and safe medication, vaccines, medical equipment and technologies should be a top priority. Conversations to explore the exceptions and limitations to intellectual property rights under the TRIPS Agreement should be undertaken. The compulsory licensing system had proven to be burdensome and needed a re-look. COVID-19 had also brought about the importance of e-commerce in today's world. However, universal benefits from the trading system could only be gained if Members bridged the digital divide. The needs of developing and LDC Members on e-commerce should be addressed. At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was disrupting global supply chains and international trade, the global economy would benefit immensely from positive signals and messages from the rules-based multilateral trading system.

1.233. The representative of the Bahamas, speaking as an Observer, associated with the statements made by CARICOM and the ACP. COVID-19 had changed the world. The health crisis had morphed into an economic crisis with disruptive and devastating impact on the socio-economic systems of States. Its effects would be greater on the more vulnerable and was another sobering reminder of the interconnectedness in the global village. Predictions were that in 2020 global trade would decline by between 13% and 32% and the global economy would contract by 3.2%. Recognizing the contagiousness of the virus, the Government of The Bahamas had acted decisively to contain its spread and limit fatalities. To date, there had been 96 confirmed cases and 11 fatalities.

1.234. On 24 March, its government had introduced emergency measures to protect the health and well-being of citizens, reduce the impact of the virus on the country's fragile healthcare, social services and other essential service providers while assisting and protecting the most vulnerable and unemployed. Those measures included the closure of all sea and airports which had inevitably led to hotel closures; physical distancing, self-isolation and quarantine protocols; national curfews and lockdowns; closure of non-essential businesses; closure of schools and tertiary institutions necessitating online teaching; utilities, rent and mortgage deferrals; USD 20 million in short-term loan support to small businesses to minimize layoffs; unemployment benefits and food and school lunch programmes. The policies implemented were however expected to lead to a recession further exacerbating The Bahamas' financial position and threatening fiscal sustainability plans. At a time when it could need concessionary loans, the categorization of The Bahamas as a high-income country without considering its vulnerabilities or exogenous factors made it ineligible for such loans.

1.235. Tourism accounts for an estimated 50% of GDP, just under 50% of direct employment, and had a cascading impact across the broader economy. The United Nations World Tourism Organization predicted that tourism would contract from 20% to 30%. While many economic sectors could recover once restrictions were lifted, consumer confidence reduction and restrictions on the international movement of persons would negatively impact The Bahamas. The contraction in tourism and unplanned increase in government expenditure would also adversely impact The Bahamas' foreign currency reserves, its ability to service external debt and its ability to pay for vital imports and access global capital markets. As a net food importer importing approximately 90% of its food, food security was a major concern.

1.236. While tourism was the largest sector of the economy, the threat of the blacklisting of the financial services sector, the second largest contributor to the Bahamian economy, by international partners with whom it cooperated, presented another challenge for policymakers. At the same time, The Bahamas was still recovering from the most economically devastating natural disaster in its history, Hurricane Dorian, a category 5 hurricane which had struck in September 2019. The slow moving hurricane had effectively decimated economies which had taken decades to build, causing significant loss of life, millions of dollars in infrastructural damage, substantial revenue losses, high unemployment and the displacement of thousands on the islands impacted. With another active hurricane seasons opening on 1 June, concerns mounted for policymakers.

1.237. The challenges the pandemic had underscored required that international community to harness its collective imagination and talents to support each other in order to successfully solve common challenges be it climate change or economic inequalities existing between States. The Bahamas was an Observer of the WTO, the organization comprising Members who negotiated the rules to govern international trade. The WTO's post COVID-19 response presented an opportunity to see how Members interpreted those rules and their impact on vulnerable trading partners; what policy space, tools and flexibilities would be relied upon and how a developing country like The Bahamas given its vulnerabilities would fare when those rules were implemented.

1.238. The representative of Belarus, speaking as an Observer, commended Director-General Azevêdo for his valuable work since 2013 which had also resulted in five new WTO accessions and acknowledged his personal engagement in supporting the advancement of negotiations on Belarus' WTO accession. That day's discussion had reconfirmed the importance of the multilateral trading system during such uncertain and difficult period. Multilateral approach, coordination and transparency were the key elements needed to overcome all the complexities growing from the pandemic. While being an observer government, Belarus shared many of the concerns voiced by Members that day. Belarus supported the WTO special register initiative and had already contributed information about national trade-related measures applied in response to the pandemic. All such measures should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, and should not create unnecessary barriers to trade. Despite all current difficulties, Belarus called upon the Members to keep accessions among the WTO priorities during this and the post-COVID period.

1.239. Accessions were vital for the WTO to reconfirm its relevance and openness for further enlargement that would make its Membership truly universal. On 30 April, Belarus had chaired the first virtual meeting of the Informal Group of Acceding Governments. Many countries, including Belarus, had voiced support for multilateralism and had reconfirmed their commitment to continue accession negotiations. Belarus remained fully committed to the earliest accession to the WTO and was ready to finalise the negotiations at mutually acceptable terms. Belarus had to postpone its thirteenth Working Party meeting scheduled for 24 March despite everything had already been prepared and the airgram already issued. To move its accession process forward, Belarus was ready to address the remaining concerns regarding the Working Party Report, market access and plurilateral issues through consultations and negotiations with members of the Working Party.

1.240. The representative of Uzbekistan, speaking as an Observer, said that, concerning measures imposed on economic sectors in Uzbekistan during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Uzbekistan was making its best efforts to minimize the economic aftermath of the global pandemic of the country's foreign trade and to successfully maintain foreign and domestic business within the country. The Republic's Anti-Crisis Commission was formed to promote operative solutions and implement measures for the provision of macroeconomic stability, uninterrupted operation of industries and economic sectors, to stimulate foreign economic activity and for the prevention of a sharp decline in the country's aggregate income. Measures had been taken by the Government of Uzbekistan such as creating the Anti-Crisis Fund with the shared capital of more than USD 1 billion to support entrepreneurship, employment, infrastructure projects and the national investment programme. More than USD 3 billion of renewable revolving credit facilities to businesses were made available for the private sector to avoid liquidity gaps and for the continued production of consumer and medical products. Businesses were allowed to export goods without payment guarantees. There had been have a lot measures taken in Uzbekistan and it had provided the Secretariat relevant information on what was going on in its business sector and related issues during the pandemic.

1.241. Regarding its accession process to the WTO, as had been rightly mentioned by Belarus, Uzbekistan was also interested in holding a third Working Party Session as soon as possible. The Government of Uzbekistan attached great importance to an early resumption of the Working Party

after merely fifteen years of inactivity. Since last summer, Uzbekistan had circulated a comprehensive set of documentary inputs including those circulated the previous week and had also highlighted its robust commitment in joining the WTO based on market reforms. There was already sufficient documentary base to hold the third meeting of the Working Party as had been mentioned by the Chair of its Working Party in his letter circulated on 14 May among the members of the Working Party. Uzbekistan conveyed its strong desire to hold the fourth meeting at the earliest possible date including in virtual format. Uzbekistan was working with the Secretariat regarding the technical and logistical feasibility in organizing a Working Party meeting virtually. Once again, Uzbekistan encouraged Members to consider engaging in some parallel bilateral market access negotiations directly with Tashkent as soon as possible.

1.242. The Chairman⁹ noted that it had been a very informative and useful discussion with some 65 delegations taking the floor which was a record for the General Council in the last seven years. That was a credit to all delegations participating and also to the Secretariat for facilitating the platform. But the discussion did not end that day. Regrettably, Members would be living with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for some time ahead. The need for health protection of people around the world clearly remained the urgent priority and many delegations had noted the importance of trade in that context – to keep markets open in order to facilitate the flow of essential medical goods as well as agricultural and food products. The adverse impact of the crisis on the world economy and the severe economic downturn had also been widely evoked in the discussion that day, together with the many different policy dimensions to the response and the recovery.

1.243. Going forward, and as governments considered options for immediate responses to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as long-term ones, their biggest challenge in the trade sphere was to ensure that trade policies, and the work that they did as Members of the WTO, were part of the solution to assist and support that recovery. As many had said, it was important that emergency measures did not have the unintended consequences to further aggravate the global economic crisis down the road which underlined the need to consider using the least harmful trade policy instruments and to adopt a coordinated and cooperative approach in addressing the global challenges they were facing.

1.244. As many had also emphasised, as governments looked ahead and implemented the necessary policies for recovery, multilateral cooperation was more important than ever. A crisis of that magnitude – unprecedented in their lifetime – could best be addressed through the international community enhancing cooperation and coordination, including at the WTO. As a Member-driven organization, there could not have been a more important moment in its 25-year existence as one delegation had put it that day, for Members to "step up and drive". He looked forward to continued exchange of views and sharing of information like the one they had had that day, in that and in other appropriate formats.

1.245. The General Council took note of the statements¹⁰.

1.246. In concluding, the Chairman noted that, as he had said on 14 May during the Informal HODs meeting and further to the decision announced by the Director-General to step down as of 31 August, he intended to immediately engage with Members and initiate as soon as possible a process for the appointment of a new Director-General, as set out in the guidelines for the appointment of Directors-General contained in WT/L/509. He would shortly send out a communication to all Members and in line with the guidelines, he would also be consulting with Members to look at establishing expedited deadlines as necessary, given the very limited time before 1 September.

1.247. He then confirmed that, as noted in a communication sent to all delegations that week, the next regular General Council meeting would take place as scheduled, on Friday 29 May, in virtual format. The airgram with the list of items for the agenda for the meeting would close on Monday 18 May, close of business, and would be circulated on Tuesday 19 May. Technical and logistical arrangements would be communicated in due course.

⁹ See JOB/GC/228.

¹⁰ At their request, the statements of Chad (LDCs) and of Libya (Observer) are incorporated in the minutes of this meeting and can be found in the annex of this document.

ANNEX

At their request, the following statements are incorporated in the minutes of this special virtual meeting: Chad (LDCs) and Libya (Observer).

1. Chad (LDCs)

I take the floor on behalf of the LDC Group, and I thank the Chair for convening this meeting of the General Council to discuss the trade-related measures taken by several Members in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the LDC Group recently submitted a communication to all Members, on 4 May, specifically on trade measures taken by WTO Members since the outbreak of the crisis.

In recent months, several governments have adopted a series of protective measures to slow down the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic and avoid the collapse of their domestic healthcare system. Some of these measures imply trade restrictions and can affect the LDCs' access to critical medical goods and basic food products.

In April 2020, the World Customs Organization produced with the support of the WHO "an indicative list" of medical supplies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we explained in our communication circulated earlier this month, the LDCs do not always domestically produce these products and equipment. Most of our countries are dependent therefore on imports from abroad to protect the health of our populations and combat the pandemic.

Of course, our Group is aware of the WTO rules which stipulate, under the GATT Agreement, that Members have the right to adopt temporary export restrictions and prohibitions to prevent or relieve critical shortages of essential products. Naturally, we understand that Members seek to ensure the fundamental protection of their citizens.

However, in this period of unprecedented and universal health crisis, it is also essential to ensure that those measures are not implemented at the expense of the most fragile Members, including the LDCs, at the risk of seeing the virus spread and settle sustainably in our world which has become interdependent humanly and economically.

Thus, as we expressed in our written submission, and at the last TNC meeting, the LDC Group requests that export prohibitions or restrictions not be imposed with respect to those products identified by the WHO and the WCO as critical to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, when such products are exported to LDCs for our domestic use or for humanitarian purposes.

We also encourage Members to expedite and facilitate the flow and transit and departure of these products in accordance with their WTO obligations under the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

We know that every country in the world is trying to mobilise their resources to alleviate the impact of the illness and save lives. In this context, we reiterate our call to developed and developing countries to refrain as much as possible from imposing measures on products exported to LDCs.

All Members taking measures should follow WTO rules not to use the measures as a disguised restriction on trade.

Beyond the medical and pharmaceutical products that we listed in the appendix to our communication of 4 May, several WTO Members have also imposed export restriction or prohibitions on certain basic food products such as wheat, rice, or sugar, in response to a perceived risk of critical shortage.

As observed during the 2007-2008 food price crisis, such measures if implemented massively could impact import-dependent countries and particularly the LDCs' ability to purchase food and meet their domestic demand. To prevent such a situation, our call for unrestricted or prohibited exports also covers basic food products that the LDCs need to ensure the food of their population.

Once again, the LDC Group recognizes the need for any country to guarantee health and food protection for its people. But, as long as domestic stocks and production capacities remain existing, the LDCs call for solidarity, in this tragic period, and not to restrict or prohibit exports of medical products or basic food products purchased by LDCs or for humanitarian purposes.

Finally, as we envisage possible post-crisis scenarios, Members and the WTO Director-General are also requested to collaborate with other international organizations to support the LDCs in their economic recovery as a result of this pandemic including through continuous support under the EIF, the Aid for Trade initiative and other programmes.

2. Libya (Observer)

Libya aligns itself with the statement made for the African Group presented by Her Excellency, the Ambassador of Botswana.

As we all deal with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its shattering impact on the global healthcare, economic and financial systems, we are reminded, as it appears to be obvious, that the world has yet to be able to put its hands around the ripple effect of this pandemic and what it has caused and continues to do so.

While we are all deeply concerned at the rapid spread of the pandemic, and as the world calls for solidarity to fight it, my country is facing this serious public health threat in a most challenging way. The COVID-19 pandemic in Libya is stretching the already fragile and volatile Libyan healthcare system beyond imagination. This whilst the Libyan Government is enduring for over a year now an armed conflict triggered by an act of aggression on many of the cities, including the capital, in what has become very clear to be a failed coup d'état attempt for authoritarian ambitions supported by certain external regional and international state intervention in a proxy war aimed at seizing and handing power outside the democratic and legal process and in a flagrant violation to national and international laws.

My country, Libya, throughout history and time, has played an important role in being a bridge in global trade and commerce because of its geopolitical location and resources. Today, more than any time in the past, Libya is well positioned to play a constructive role as countries look for ways to reignite its economies. Libya has the means to be an economic engine to economically help the entire region. This partnership role is direly needed for the security and stability of Libya, neighbouring countries and the region.

The internationally recognized Government of National Accord that has assumed its authority and legitimacy through the Libyan, UN-brokered, political agreement of Skheirat stands ready to collaborate with Member States and the UN through the ever so needed channels of multilateralism, to solidify economic stability and prosperity in Libya to benefit all Libyans, neighbouring countries and the region.

Libya calls on the WTO and its Members to take a direct and more engaging role in securing peace in Libya for the benefit of all. As responsible global community members, we all have a duty and share in the responsibility to end armed conflicts particularly during a pandemic such as the COVID-19 and work together to address the severe economic problems we face together today.

To conclude, I would remind us all, if the COVID-19 pandemic proved one thing to us, it is that we are all in this together. We either make it together or we all sink.

In the spirit of solidarity and peace.

My wishes to all to stay well and safe.
