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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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**COMMITTEE ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES – JUNE 2020  
INFORMATION SHARING SESSION ON COVID-19**

**INFORMATION PROVIDED BY MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS ON QUESTIONS  
RELATED TO SPS MEASURES AND COVID-19**

**COMMUNICATION FROM COLOMBIA**

The following communication, received on 10 July 2020, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Colombia.

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1. Firstly, we would like to thank the WTO Secretariat, the STDF, the "three sisters" (CODEX, OIE and IPPC) and the WHO for the valuable information that they have shared with us today, in the midst of this pandemic that now has the American continent as its epicentre. We would also like to thank all Members that have shared information and above all those that have enabled trade facilitation in the midst of the pandemic, implementing science-based measures consistent with WTO obligations.
  2. In that regard, Colombia has implemented measures to mitigate the negative impact on world trade in agricultural products. For example, from 27 March, we have been accepting scanned copies of phytosanitary and veterinary certificates for the duration of the health emergency caused by COVID-19. We have also supported various statements such as "Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with open and predictable trade in agricultural and food products" and the "Statement on COVID-19 and the multilateral trading system by Ministers responsible for the WTO".
  3. In addition, as we have stated in various forums, Colombia shares the concern of other Members regarding not only the pandemic per se but also the emergence of restrictive measures in the current context. For example, when a Member notifies the WTO of new modifications relating to maximum residue levels (MRLs), various state agencies have to be contacted to assess their impact, to decide what to do and, if necessary, to send observations to the Member in question. However, since March most of these agencies have been devoting 100% of their efforts to combating the pandemic. The constant regulatory changes are diverting resources needed to save lives to efforts to participate in consultations and processes, and so we are not in a position to fully exercise our rights at the WTO.
  4. In this regard, a group of Members – over 30 in number as of today – has requested the European Union (EU) to suspend processes relating to reductions in MRLs for plant protection products in light of the COVID-19 pandemic ([G/SPS/GEN/1778/Rev.1](#)). We co-sponsors will request the Secretariat this afternoon to circulate Rev.2 of the document including more Members.<sup>1</sup>
  5. This request is being made in the midst of a critical situation in different parts of the world, even though certain countries already have it under control. In the case of Colombia, we have not been spared the devastating effects of COVID-19. On 11 March, the day that the WTO suspended all meetings, there were nine reported cases in Colombia; on 11 May, the day when the request to the EU was circulated, we already had over 11,000 cases; and this week we have sadly exceeded

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<sup>1</sup> See G/SPS/GEN/1778/Rev.2 circulated on 25 June 2020.

the threshold of 70,000 cases. And the figure continues to rise in our country and in practically all countries that are signatories to the request.

6. In conclusion, allow us simply to quote part of the document referred to above: "We recognize that Members have the right to determine the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection necessary to protect human, animal and plant life and health, and to establish measures to that end. However, such measures must be science-based and should not create unnecessary barriers to trade."

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