



**Ministerial Conference
Eleventh Session
Buenos Aires, 10-13 December 2017**

Original: English

**RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITIES FOR CARIBBEAN AND SMALL AND
VULNERABLE ECONOMIES RECOVERING FROM NATURAL DISASTERS**

PROPOSAL BY ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, DOMINICA, GRENADA, ST. KITTS AND NEVIS,
SAINT LUCIA AND ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

The following communication, dated 9 December 2017, is being circulated at the request of the delegations of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

INTRODUCTION

Three Members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States are grappling with the aftermath of the passage and devastation caused by two Category 5 hurricanes (Irma and Maria) that swept through the Caribbean region in the space of two weeks in September 2017. The near total destruction to property, infrastructure, and the loss of lives recorded particularly in the islands of Barbuda and Dominica has highlighted the catastrophic impact that severe storms and hurricanes can wreak on small island developing states.

There can be no doubt that these Countries will need to engage the flexibilities in the multilateral trading system as they undertake the gigantic task of economic reconstruction. The economic impact of the hurricane in Dominica is measured at over 200% of GDP. But the true challenge will be felt for many years as the countries seek to rebuild their agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors.

The ripple effects of the devastation on other OECS countries, which may not have been directly impacted have also been substantial particularly for those which rely on fresh agricultural produce from the affected countries to meet the dietary needs of their population.

OECS Member States believe that there is a role to be played by the multilateral trading system, more specifically the WTO to contribute to enabling the required reconstruction and rebuilding within the context of the rights and obligations; and rules and disciplines contained in the WTO Agreements.

We strongly believe that specific attention and appropriate treatment ought to be given to those countries faced with those circumstances. Especially when they are the smallest, weakest, and most vulnerable which need to rebuild infrastructure to resume sustainable economic growth and development following catastrophic natural disasters.

THE PROPOSAL

In that regard, the six WTO Members of the OECS propose that the following language be included in the text of the Ministerial Declaration or other Outcome Document issued by Ministers at the end of the 11th Ministerial Conference to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina:

"We note the destruction and loss of critical infrastructure and capacities at all levels caused during this year's unprecedented hurricane season, particularly to the Small Island Developing States and SVE's of the Caribbean and acknowledge that reconstruction and recovery and redevelopment will take many years. During this time WTO rules and disciplines must not stand in the way of reconstruction and we agree that the full flexibility of the multilateral trading system should be deployed so that reconstruction measures taken by the affected Members will be considered compatible with the WTO Agreements."
