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Trade-related regulations for economic integration and sustainable development

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The parallel event, aimed at exploring how to navigate the complexity and increasing number of trade regulations and how transparency, data and evidence-based tools could support regional economic integration and more predictable trade, featured four panellists: Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Chile to the World Trade Organization. Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the World Trade Organization; Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the World Trade Organization; and Executive Director, Trade Law Centre, South Africa.
2. In opening the discussion, the Head, Trade Analysis Branch, UNCTAD, underlined the significant impact of non-tariff measures, which were two to four times more costly than tariffs, with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, such as small and medium-sized enterprises, women and businesses in developing countries and the least developed countries. He noted that transparency, good regulatory practices and regulatory cooperation could reduce trade costs associated with non-tariff measures while at the same time preserving public policy benefits. In addition, the Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the World Trade Organization, expressed appreciation for continued support by UNCTAD and the Economic Research Institute for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia in increasing transparency with regard to non-tariff measures; and a representative of the Economic Research Institute reaffirmed the commitment to sustaining and deepening the partnership with UNCTAD. On the occasion of the parallel event, an updated regional non-tariff measures database for ASEAN Plus Six was launched.
3. One panellist stated that Chile needed to comply with many divergent regulations and private standards and that, in this regard, the network of free trade agreements facilitated the navigation of different non-tariff measures. Many of the agreements had chapters on technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures and, together with the relevant committees at the World Trade Organization, they served as forums for dialogue on standards and regulations. Finally, she noted the positive impact of harmonization in mitigating potential trade obstacles.
4. Another panellist stated that non-tariff measures, particularly sanitary and phytosanitary measures, had a crucial role in the exports of New Zealand, which were primarily driven by the agricultural sector, that is, the industry most affected by non-tariff measures. She expressed the commitment of New Zealand to science-based regulations in



the food sector, the adherence to international standards where feasible and the role of New Zealand in shaping international standards. Finally, she stated that New Zealand benefited from an extensive network of free trade agreements, of which non-tariff measures constituted an integral element; and that New Zealand had set up a trade desk in order to effectively address trade-related inquiries by businesses.

5. One panellist noted that, despite the different levels of development among ASEAN member States, there was consensus that trade was crucial for economic growth. Navigating evolving trade regulations had become essential in sustaining and facilitating such growth and, in this regard, the panellist stressed the recognition by ASEAN of the importance of evidence-based engagement in order to prevent protectionist non-tariff measures. Finally, he stated that ASEAN had been implementing a single window system, designed to help traders; and stressed that trust, mutual recognition and harmonization were essential in alleviating the burden of non-tariff measures on international trade.

6. Another panellist stated that the African Continental Free Trade Area, with the support of UNCTAD, had established a dedicated platform for reporting and monitoring non-tariff barriers, allowing businesses to submit complaints about trade obstacles. A mechanism to ensure the systemic resolution of non-tariff barriers was not in place; however, some countries reported having successfully resolved several complaints. Finally, she stressed the importance of the mutual recognition of standards and harmonization, noting East African Community progress in adopting harmonized product standards designed to facilitate regional trade.

7. During the ensuing discussion, the panellists emphasized the key role of UNCTAD in enhancing transparency in trade regulations and stated that member States should continue to support this important work. In addition, the panellists underscored the disproportionate effects of non-tariff measures on women, stressed the importance of addressing such inequalities and addressed the potential role of non-tariff measures in advancing climate action.

8. In her closing remarks, the Director, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD, highlighted the importance of non-tariff measures in public policy objectives and of supporting a rules-based trading system with clear and transparent regulations. She emphasized that non-tariff measures would remain an essential part of UNCTAD work, subject to the mandate and support provided by member States.
