



**United Nations  
Conference  
on Trade and  
Development**

Distr.  
LIMITED

TD/B/COM.3/L.14  
2 August 1999

Original: ENGLISH

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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
Commission on Enterprise, Business  
Facilitation and Development  
Fourth session  
Geneva, 19-23 July 1999  
Agenda item 4

**ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AND THE INTEGRATION OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES  
AND COUNTRIES WITH ECONOMIES IN TRANSITION IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Agreed conclusions and recommendations \***

1. The Commission recalls that in the agreed conclusions of its previous sessions, it stressed the growing importance of electronic commerce for trade and development. Since then, the trends identified by the Commission have not weakened. UNCTAD should continue to assist developing countries, the least developed countries (LDCs) and countries with economies in transition in issues relating to electronic commerce.
2. Considering the intersectoral nature of electronic commerce, which includes technical, economic, social, legal and other policy-related aspects, such assistance should continue to be provided in a spirit of cooperation and synergy with other relevant institutions.

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\* As adopted at the closing plenary meeting on 23 July 1999.

3. The Commission takes note of the agreed conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Meeting on Capacity-building in Electronic Commerce: Legal and Regulatory Aspects, as described in the oral report provided by the Expert Meeting's chairman, and recommends that the Trade and Development Board should endorse the agreed conclusions and recommendations as amended (see chapter ... of the Report of the Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development on its fourth session).

4. The prominent role of enterprises as early adopters of electronic commerce cannot be underestimated, and should be granted appropriate recognition in the implementation of the recommendations below.

#### **A. Addressed to Governments**

5. Governments are invited to pursue their efforts to stimulate the emergence of an “e-commerce culture” by sensitizing and involving all relevant parts of civil society in their national efforts to promote participation in electronic commerce. In this context, due consideration should be granted to the experience of countries which have successfully established “e-commerce national task forces”.

6. Efforts to encourage investment in information infrastructure, the provision of supportive legal and regulatory frameworks, and the adoption of measures likely to lower access and usage costs of telecommunications and Internet-based services should be pursued and strengthened.

7. Training and education in areas such as information technology and knowledge-intensive activities should become part of the regular academic curriculum, and efforts to upgrade local teaching skills (including through the training of trainers) should be encouraged. The use of local languages and the provision of local content in electronic exchanges of information (including electronic commerce) should be supported and encouraged.

### **B. Addressed to the international community**

8. The international community is encouraged to grant priority in relevant ongoing discussions, debates and negotiations to the development dimension of electronic commerce.
9. Additional efforts are encouraged in the following areas:
  - (a) Assistance to developing countries, LDCs and countries with economies in transition in enhancing their trade efficiency through the use of electronic commerce;
  - (b) Provision of appropriate support to efforts already under way at the national, regional and interregional levels to upgrade the skills of developing countries, LDCs and countries with economies in transition in electronic commerce and related areas; and
  - (c) Appropriate efforts to assist LDCs and other countries with similar needs in their efforts to build capacity in knowledge-based activities, in particular electronic commerce. Preparations for the upcoming Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in 2001, might provide an adequate framework to identify possible avenues for action and international support in this regard.

### **C. Addressed to UNCTAD**

10. UNCTAD is called upon to continue its work on electronic commerce on the basis of the following principles:
  - (a) Exchanges of experiences in the area of electronic commerce and related areas, such as Internet-based services, should be stimulated;

- (b) Attention should be devoted to the development dimensions of electronic commerce, including questions related to access to information infrastructure, human resources development, and provision of local content;
- (c) Continued attention should be devoted to inter-institutional cooperation with the relevant bodies, in order to enhance synergies between UNCTAD's work on electronic commerce and that of other forums;
- (d) UNCTAD should continue to assist developing countries with analyses, training courses, workshops and seminars and other forms of technical assistance in helping them to prepare for the ongoing multilateral discussions and negotiations on electronic commerce and related issues, including in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), so as to enhance developing countries' capacities to participate actively in electronic commerce; and
- (e) Continued priority should be granted to pragmatic approaches to electronic commerce, including the stimulation of exchanges of experiences among enterprises involved in electronic commerce, awareness-raising and support at the regional, interregional and international levels.

11. In particular, UNCTAD is called upon to support developing countries, LDCs and countries with economies in transition in their efforts to better comprehend the issues related to electronic commerce, and to design and implement their own electronic commerce strategies. In this context, the following areas of activities should receive appropriate resources and priority:

- (a) The pursuit of efforts to collect and disseminate information regarding electronic commerce and development, including on the work under way in various relevant forums;

- (b) The provision of analytical and statistical studies on the various aspects of electronic commerce which are of particular importance for the participation of developing countries, LDCs and countries with economies in transition in international trade: the inter-relationship between, on the one hand, electronic commerce and, on the other, trade efficiency areas such as customs, transport, banking and insurance, trade facilitation and telecommunications should be central in such work;
- (c) The continuation of its work in enhancing developing countries' awareness and knowledge of ongoing efforts to establish appropriate policy for electronic commerce: close cooperation with bodies such as the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), WIPO, ITU, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), WTO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other relevant organizations is encouraged in this domain; and
- (d) The pursuit of its efforts to stay abreast of the latest developments in the techniques, tools and solutions used by the more advanced players in the field of electronic commerce, and to provide members of UNCTAD with relevant information in this regard.

12. The Commission considers with great interest the work already undertaken by UNCTAD on electronic commerce in the context of United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/220 of 7 April 1999. In particular, the organization of regional workshops on electronic commerce and development (to be hosted between August and October 1999 by, respectively, Peru, Kenya and Sri Lanka) offers a major opportunity to enhance global participation in electronic commerce and related debates. However, the Commission recommends that member States be consulted in the development of future proposals in order to reflect member States' actual needs. It is the hope of the Commission that these workshops will be open to participation from experts and delegates from other regions, including from developed countries, and that their respective outcomes can be appropriately reflected in relevant international forums, such as the OECD meeting on electronic commerce in October 1999, the Third WTO Ministerial

Conference in November-December 1999, and UNCTAD X in February 2000. The Commission expresses interest in extending similar activities to countries in other regions not covered by the above-mentioned workshops. The Commission takes note that ECE is organizing a regional workshop on electronic commerce for countries with economies in transition and recommends that UNCTAD participate in the workshop.

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