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ROUND TABLE ON TRADE AND GENDER

15 June 2004 – Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The Round Table focused on four main themes:
 - Government policies to reduce the gender gap and enhance gender equality in the context of trade liberalization;
 - Multilateral trade commitments and the development objective of gender equality;
 - The contribution of international trade to poverty alleviation and gender equality; and
 - Capacity building for trade and enterprise development.

2. Gender inequality is characteristic of all societies. Deep-seated attitudes regarding the primacy of women's reproductive role are the basis of pervasive inequalities between men and women in social and economic life. Governments can and must act to change this situation, and experience shows that concerted policies can be effective.

3. Trade liberalization has yielded many new market opportunities for women, particularly in employment in export manufacturing and services, but it cannot replace adequate national policies to reduce gender inequalities. In the context of trade, specific national measures need to be put in place to reduce gender inequalities to enable women entrepreneurs and workers to take advantage of new market opportunities where they arise, and to reduce women's vulnerability to negative shocks from trade. Attention should also be paid to certain types of trade that have unintended, negative effects on women producers, for example food aid and imports of second hand-clothing. Moreover, countries see the greatest developmental and poverty reduction benefits from trade when gender equality policies are in force. Round Table participants recommended that the following types of *domestic measures* be taken to address gender inequality in the context of international trade:
 - Improvements in women's and girls' access to education and skills;
 - Measures to reduce discrimination in labour markets;
 - Access to export market information and credit (not just micro-credit) for women entrepreneurs;
 - Gender equality in rights to land and other productive resources;
 - Reduction of violence against women, without which they cannot benefit from other rights;

- Support to women in their reproductive roles, for example in child-feeding programmes and crèches;
- Mainstreaming, consistency and proactive implementation of gender equality policies throughout all government departments.

4. In respect of specific trade policies, the commitments that Governments are prepared to make and the concessions they are prepared to grant in international trade negotiations are the consequence of policy-making processes at home. These should be informed by analysis of the expected impacts of alternative policies on different social groups and economic interests. Countries that have concerted gender equality policies in place should see the fruit of such policies reflected in the position taken by the Government in trade negotiations. The Round Table recommended in this connection that *ex-ante* gender impact assessments be carried out as a matter of course. Studies to date suggest the following elements for ***national trade policies***:

- Developing countries should draw up a common list of gender-sensitive products and prioritize demands for reduction of developed country subsidies and market access restrictions on this basis;
- Reduction of developed country agricultural subsidies would result in improvements in domestic market prospects for many women's crops;
- Reduction of tariff escalation would result in the creation of many jobs for women in food-processing industries;
- Reduction of barriers to trade in services, and in particular to the movement of services providers, would greatly enhance female employment opportunities;
- Continued improvements in non-agricultural market access would result in further employment opportunities for women; and
- Ever-increasing product standards (SPS and TBTs) are especially problematic for women, whose farms are small and under-resourced.

5. Recommendations were also made for ***international agencies***, notably UNCTAD itself, as follows:

- The Inter-Agency Task Force should continue with its diagnostic and analytical work and thereby continue to raise policy makers' awareness of the gender impacts of trade expansion and the gender effects of prospective changes in trade policies;
- A methodology for the *ex-ante* gender impact of trade policies needs to be developed;
- Trade-capacity-building efforts need to be continued and improved, including by taking into account the constraints that reproductive tasks impose on women entrepreneurs' participation;
- Partnerships need to be fostered between poor women producers in developing countries and commercial buyers in the North with a view to increasing their ability to access developed country markets.
