

Item 6

JUSSCANZ Statement regarding the IGE Meetings on E-commerce and Digital Economy

For the 66th Executive Session of the Trade and Development Board

February 6, 2018

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

It is my honor to speak on behalf of JUSSCANNZ.

Last year, two IGE meetings were held for the first time; one e-commerce and the digital economy and the other on financing for development.

The Terms of Reference, or TORs, for the IGEs show that we member states can work together to produce mutually agreed documents. That should be encouraging for our future work for this TDB and the Phase 2 process. That being said, no process, or document, is going to be perfect on the first try.

Based on what we observed in the preparation, organization, and delivery of the IGEs, we Member States need to continue to work with the Secretariat to make sure the meetings are taking place according to the TORs we agreed on.

Our review and discussion of agenda Item 6 and 7, are a good reminder that one of the functions of the Trade and Development Board is to make sure that UNCTAD is properly governed. The Accra Accord identifies eight focus areas for the TDB and we would like to highlight two of them:

Para 192 (e) says: “considering the work programme and of the organization as a whole and its consistency with mandates”

And

Para 192 (f) says: “overseeing the operation of its subsidiary bodies and ensuring that they and the secretariat are discharging their mandates in accordance with the intergovernmental decisions of UNCTAD.”

With mandate and oversight in mind, the JUSCANZ countries will share some observations and suggestions for the Secretariat for the delivery of future IGEs, and I will make a similar intervention for the IGE on financing for development.

While we appreciate the briefing and organizational sessions organized by the Secretariat, we recall that paragraph 7 of the TORs says the agreed policy recommendations should be drawn from the IGE discussions. In both IGEs, the Secretariat initiated the drafting of those policy recommendations, very much in the format of a standard resolution, rather than what a group of experts would likely come up with. We would strongly recommend, that this way of delivering the IGEs outcome be revisited in order to genuinely offer the possibility for experts to craft policy recommendations that only they can provide.

The purpose of the IGEs is to draw on participants' expertise to develop specific and credible policy recommendations relevant to the topics under discussion. The recommendations do not need to reiterate or reaffirm past UN decisions, or promote the work UNCTAD does.. What member states want and expect is technical expert recommendations that are drawn and representative from the discussions held during the session. That approach is clearly defined in the Terms of Reference for the two IGEs.

It is up to the Chair and Secretariat to actively facilitate a discussion that leads to organic recommendations. Unfortunately what we saw in 2017 process resulted in some Geneva-based delegates negotiating the recommendations rather than having a genuine expert-led process. Our call is for the Secretariat to take stock of the lessons from this first experience and to make the necessary adjustments based on those lessons.

In Nairobi, we agreed to create the two IGEs because we saw a value in engaging experts on e-commerce and financing for development. The policy recommendations before us today did not properly reflect expert discussions which is why we need to regroup, and reflect on how to improve this year's process and outcome.

With that feedback in mind, we propose a TDB decision that requests the Secretariat to revisit its approach to the E-Commerce and Digital Economy IGE in order to make future sessions fully align with the Terms of Reference in terms of delivering an expert-led outcome. We further request that the Secretariat report on the changes it made in the 2018 IGEs, at the mid-term review, so that member states can assess progress.

We sincerely hope that more experts from capitals will attend both future IGE meetings. It is important that the Member States and the Secretariat continue to work together in order to assure the relevance and credibility of both IGE meetings by following the TORs to produce a meaningful outcome.

Thank you for your kind attention