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**Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Development Interface between the Multilateral
Trading System and Regional Trade Agreements
Geneva, 15-16 March 2007**

The Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is convening an Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Development Interface between the Multilateral Trading System and Regional Trade Agreements. The meeting will be held on Thursday 15 and Friday 16 March 2007 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, and will open at 10 a.m.

Background and purpose of the meeting

Regional trade agreements (RTAs) have proliferated worldwide to become a prominent feature of today's international trade environment. This trend is likely to be here to stay and affects, alongside with the multilateral trading system (MTS), developing countries' prospects for beneficial integration into the global economy. The significance of this phenomenon has recently come to be felt more acutely with the slow pace of progress in the Doha round negotiations. Questions have arisen as to how developing countries in particular could maximize development gains from both regional and multilateral processes and how RTAs can contribute to the MTS and negotiating processes.

Negotiating RTAs presents opportunities and challenges for developing countries. One important challenge is to design and negotiate appropriate agreements while putting in place flanking supportive measures. The negotiations would need to take into account multilateral commitments and disciplines, and possible modifications through the ongoing Doha negotiations. In turn, RTAs may influence the global trade liberalization and rule-making efforts in various ways.

Against this background, the Group will examine the development implications of RTAs and their interface with the MTS to draw practical lessons for policy options in approaching regional and multilateral integration processes. The Group will address recent trends in RTAs and their developmental and systemic implications; specific market access issues in regional trade negotiations in goods and services; regulatory provisions, including intellectual property rights, investment and competition policies; South-South trade integration and cooperation; and the manner in which RTAs and the MTS interact with each other and possible synergies and complementarities between the two processes.



Participation

The meeting is open to participation of all Member States of UNCTAD. The meeting may be of particular interest to government officials, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups, and representatives of the private sector involved in subregional, inter-regional and multilateral trade negotiations and policy making regarding trade in goods and services and other rules and regulatory issues. In addition, experts from international and regional organizations dealing with issues related to the topic will be invited as resource persons.

Member States, specialized agencies and intergovernmental bodies wishing to participate in the meeting, as well as non-governmental organizations in the General Category and those in the Special Category wishing to participate as observers, are requested to inform the UNCTAD secretariat of the names of their representatives by **9 March 2007**.

Background documents and contributed papers

The programme for the meeting, together with detailed annotations, will be provided shortly and be available on the UNCTAD website www.unctad.org under the heading “Meetings”.

In addition, all experts are encouraged to prepare and submit brief papers related to their country's and region's experience in subregional and regional trade negotiations and agreements as well as their implications for the multilateral trading system and development prospects of developing countries. These papers will be made available to the meeting in the form and language in which they are received.

Logistics

The meeting will take place at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Palais des Nations. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in the six official languages of the United Nations.

Upon arrival, participants are requested, before entering the Palais des Nations, to collect their badge at the UN Security Service at Pregny Gate. The Security Service is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (non-stop). Because of the security measures in force, participants are strongly advised to arrive before 8.30 a.m. in order to complete procedures and reach the meeting in good time. Participants are requested to carry a passport or similar national identity card with them. Taxis are not allowed to enter the grounds of the Palais des Nations, and visitors will therefore be dropped off at the requested entrance gates. Furthermore, luggage may not be brought into the buildings unless the Security Service gives special clearance.

**Further information and contact details**

All communications concerning representation at the meeting should be sent to the UNCTAD secretariat, Intergovernmental Affairs and Outreach Service, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10; *fax*: + 41(0) 22 917 0214; *e-mail*: correspondence@unctad.org.

Enquiries concerning substantive issues should be addressed to a coordinator in the substantive division, Ms. Mina Mashayekhi or Mr. Taisuke Ito, *tel*: +41 (0) 22 917 5866 or +41 (0) 22 917 4893, *fax*: +41 (0) 22 917 0044, e-mail: mina.mashayekhi@unctad.org or taisuke.ito@unctad.org.

(signed)

Supachai Panitchpakdi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD

23 February 2007