

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

UNCTAD Trade and Development Board
Geneva, 4-12 June 2018

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Item 13 (c)

Designation of non-governmental organizations for the purposes of rule 77 of the
rules of procedure of the Board

*This written contribution is made available in the language and form in which it was received. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD



Trade and Development Board, sixty-fifth session
4-12 June 2018
Room XXVI, Palais des Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

Statement by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Chair, Excellencies,

Firstly, we extend our appreciation for our addition into the UNCTAD's NGO family. The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is a feminist, membership-driven network of more than 230 women's rights organisations and activists from 27 countries in Asia Pacific. Our members, who include rural, indigenous, urban poor, migrant women, women workers and women living with disabilities, have been on the receiving end of inequitable globalisation and its systems, have experienced first-hand impacts of trade and investment rules on women's human rights. While women in Asia Pacific are routinely mentioned among the group of peoples that the Agenda 2030 should not leave behind, our struggle indicates that we are most of the time "left behind," especially in decision-making over our own bodies, our lives and the lives of our communities to determine what sustainable and just development might look like.

The crisis of multilateralism, which is the focus of this session, is a direct result of deepening and obscene levels of inequalities, of runaway catastrophic climate change and of conflict and humanitarian crisis. These are all felt differently and more deeply by women, particularly in the global south. There are mounting awareness that neoliberal economic policies widen inequalities, impact most negatively on already marginalised groups, including women, pose a threat to the future of the planet and has failed to shift government policy in most states.

Global supply chains are largely dependent on the cheap, exploitable labour of women, benefiting from precarious, contractualised conditions, an absence of health and safety measures, social protection and unionised labour. The feminisation of labour in export industries implicitly depends on unorganised labour and social inequalities such as the gender wage gap, as a source of competitive advantage.

The rationalisation of social safety nets and essential public services is made possible only by the availability of women's unpaid labour to fill the gaps in care economy. The primacy of trade rules and investor interests over environment and public interest limits the capacity of states to design national policies designed to advance environmental protections, fiscal policies, labour rights, affirmative action policies, public health and public access to basic needs and services and human rights. This is restricting the capacity of member states to meet their obligations to respect, promote and protect human rights under UN charter and international human rights laws and their ability to address the climate crisis, which threatens the livelihoods and lives of growing numbers of women in Asia Pacific.



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

While paragraph 30 of Agenda 2030 strongly urges states to “refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries,” trade agreements and trade rules that conflict with both Agenda 2030 and the UN Charter were pursued immediately after Agenda 2030 was agreed.

As women predominantly from developing countries, we recall the primary mandate of UNCTAD to support developing countries in line with the principle of international cooperation as enshrined in the UN Charter and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. We must together ensure that member states as duty-bearers are accountable to the people, who are the primary rights-holders, over the interests of multinational corporations and investors.

We call upon UNCTAD and member states to further develop and strengthen its work and analysis on the impact of trade and investment rules on women's human rights, and to do that work with feminist and women's rights organisations. We also call upon members states to continue emphasising UNCTAD as the legitimate place for trade and development discussions and policy making over any trade negotiations.

A response to the crises of multilateralism and the retreat of states to nationalism is not to continue with the “business-as-usual” trade agreements and systems. Instead, we can look to global trade rules that can support governments to develop trade systems that are based on solidarity, mutual cooperation and accountable trade processes that ensures the poor, most marginalised and impacted people and communities of their democratic, informed participation and decision-making rights.