

Multi-year Expert Meeting  
on Transport, Trade Logistics and  
Trade Facilitation  
8th Session

**Climate Change Adaptation for Seaports  
in Support of the 2030 Agenda  
for Sustainable Development**

27–28 October 2020

**Opening remarks**

by

**Mr. Jan Hoffmann**

Chief, Trade Logistics Branch  
Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD



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Virtual meeting

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eighth session

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## Agenda item 3: Climate Change Adaptation for Seaports in Support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda Opening remarks

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Jan Hoffmann, Chief, Trade Logistics Branch  
Division on Technology and Logistics  
UNCTAD

Chair, distinguished Delegates, colleagues:

### Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important a resilient maritime supply chain is for trade and development. It has reminded us of the vulnerabilities of the global trading system, and of the need to listen to science to prepare for future challenges.

The major challenge for resilient maritime supply chains of the future is climate change. There is no doubt of the need to mitigate climate change, and to adapt to higher temperatures, more volatile weather patterns, and rising sea levels.

Ports have been affected early on by the Covid-19 pandemic. But they have also been key partners to successfully ensure that trade continues to flow, while protecting transport workers, port officials, and the population from the virus. We can learn from this experience.

We can learn from this experience so that we are prepared for the challenge of climate change and the threat it poses for transport infrastructure and services.

## Climate change adaptation

The challenge of climate change looms larger than the challenge posed by Covid-19.

Ports are critical infrastructure assets that serve as catalysts of economic growth and development and are key nodes in closely interconnected global supply chains. In addition to being gateways to international trade, they also create employment, contribute to GDP and support urban development.

Mr Chair,

This eighth session of our Multi-Year Expert Meeting builds upon our earlier sessions, where we already discussed sustainable freight transport, transit, trade facilitation and a range of other related issues.

This session specifically focusses on climate change adaptation for seaports. After my opening remarks, my colleague Ms Regina Asariotis will provide an introduction to the specific issues that experts will analyse and discuss during this week's meeting. I wish to thank and congratulate Ms. Asariotis and her team for having put together a very interesting programme, with excellent speakers and important topics for discussion by you, the experts.

Allow me to share two thoughts on cross-cutting issues, to put the topic of this expert meeting into the broader context of UNCTAD's work. Two strategic issues, where we will need to increase our attention in years to come. I refer to the decarbonization and the digitalization of maritime transport.

## Context

### *1. Decarbonization of maritime transport*

We are pleased to see that the International Maritime Organization, the IMO, has set clear goals in the endeavour to reduce Green-House-Gas emissions from maritime transport. UNCTAD collaborates very closely with the IMO in the assessment of the potential impact of measures that aim at reducing carbon emissions from shipping.

In our collaboration with the IMO, we have highlighted the importance to undertake comprehensive impact assessments of the proposed measures, while also stressing our view that additional impact assessments should not delay the efforts to achieve the goals of reducing emissions.

We are also happy to see that proposals towards market-based measures are gaining momentum. We believe that it will be important to ensure that the most vulnerable economies, including small island developing states and least developed countries, can benefit from funding that may be generated through such novel measures.

The same countries that are most affected by climate change are also potentially the countries that are most negatively affected by higher transport costs or lower maritime connectivity.

UNCTAD data shows that Small Island Developing States pay on average twice as much for the transport of their foreign trade than the world average. They are also confronted with remoteness and lower maritime transport connectivity, which affects the resilience and reliability of their trade. It will be crucial to provide the necessary technical and financial support to these countries to ensure that they can adapt to climate change, and at the same time mitigate any potential impact of new regulations that affect maritime transport costs and connectivity.

The necessary support for climate change adaptation will be among the topics of our meeting here this week.

The second cross-cutting theme I would like to highlight, Mr. Chair, is digitalization.

## *2. Digitalization*

In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ports have enhanced their work on digitalization. Stakeholders who in the past may have been reluctant to embrace digital documents and electronic payments now realize that physical contact and paper documents need to be replaced by digital solutions as much as possible.

We are pleased to see that many of our UNCTAD programmes have shown to be particularly useful in helping advancing reforms, and thus also help build resilience in global supply chains. Our programmes in support of transport and trade facilitation, such as ASYCUDA, port management, trade information portals, Single Windows, e-commerce assessments, transit cargo tracking, and in general digitalization and dematerialization are in high demand.

There is one important point I wish to stress: It would be wrong to assume that there is a “trade-off” between facilitating maritime trade and transport on the one hand, and the protection of the health of port workers and population on the other. The contrary is true: Practically all the concrete solutions that we are proposing – from electronic documents, over risk management, to automation – in practice achieve both: They make shipping easier, and they reduce the risks for ports and the society.

Digitalization also helps with climate change adaptation. For example, for the purposes of risk-assessment, the generation and dissemination of tailored data and information is important. Infrastructure inventories, higher resolution data such as digital elevation models, and a better understanding of coastal processes under climate change are required for effective risk assessment and adaptation planning.

Last but not least, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask you and the distinguished participants to mark your agenda for 12 November, 15:00 in the afternoon.

## UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport 2020

On 12 November, this is Wednesday in two weeks, our Secretary General, accompanied by a high-level panel, will present the key findings of our 52<sup>nd</sup> issue of our Flag-ship publication *Review of Maritime Transport*.

For this year's *Review*, we have made a special effort to cover not only the usual long-term trends and updates in supply and demand for maritime transport, but we have also been able to include an in-depth coverage of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry. There will be testimonials from stakeholders, and a discussion of the “next normal” and the legacy of the pandemic, as the disruption has triggered a number of key trends with wide-ranging policy implications for maritime transport and trade.

Coming back to the topic of this expert meeting, Mr. Chair, one legacy we highlight in our *Review* is the greater need for systemic and coordinated policy responses at the global level. The pandemic has moved into sharp focus the importance of coordinated action when dealing with cross-border and port disruptions with wide-ranging ripple effects.

We need to maintain the momentum on sustainability, climate change adaptation and resilience building. Governments could – and should – direct the stimulus packages to support the recovery, while, at the same time, promoting other priorities including climate change mitigation and adaptation action.

Thus, coming back to where I started, Mr. Chair, policies adopted to respond to the COVID-19 challenges should support further progress in the shipping and port industry's transition to a greener, more sustainable and resilient future.

In conclusion, there are ever more good reasons for governments and UNCTAD to support climate change adaptation for seaports, and I can only wish you and the experts success and fruitful deliberations over the next two days.

