



## **50 YEARS OF UNCTAD: A CELEBRATION**

**Celebrating half a century of successes and challenges in  
trade and development  
with UNCTAD anniversary events in Geneva,  
at the Palais des Nations, 16–20 June 2014**

### **SUMMARY**



## 50 Years of UNCTAD: A Celebration

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### Looking back, UNCTAD steps firmly into the next 50 years

#### International community comes together to celebrate a historic decision – and looks ahead

Marking a high point in the week-long anniversary celebration, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon delivered the opening statement of the twenty-eighth special session of the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD, recalling that with its creation, “all members of the [United Nations] had explicitly adopted a development perspective marked by openness and looking towards the future”.

Fifty years after the conclusion of the historic conference in 1964 that established UNCTAD, the world – and UNCTAD’s work – had moved beyond North–South relations and problems, to the greater emphasis on interdependence between countries and economic sectors, Mr. Ban said. “But if the issues are more complex, the opportunities for common progress are more compelling.”

“As an anchor in the United Nations development pillar, UNCTAD has a vital role to play in helping to deliver the post-2015 agenda,” he underscored.

Addressing the Board, UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi moved UNCTAD firmly towards the road ahead, saying that “the challenge to not only to foster trade and economic growth, but also ensure that they translate into improved livelihoods, is of particular relevance today at the end of a decade of jobless growth. It is central to creating development that is sustainable – economically, socially and environmentally”.

In stepping up the drive to complete the Millennium Development Goals and agree on a transformative post-2015 development agenda, that agenda should aim to create conditions that allow more countries to achieve the kind of “virtuous circles” of productive investment, rising incomes, poverty reduction and expanding markets that bring about lasting economic and social transformation.

Mr. Kituyi noted that he was encouraged by the ongoing discussions in New York on sustainable development goals, which showed a clear realization that the international community should focus more on the economic factors that facilitate the achievement of more ambitious goals. “I am also pleased to say that UNCTAD is playing a lead role in modelling appropriate means of implementation for the sustainable development goals.”

He echoed Mr. Ban, saying that “to succeed we will have to strengthen our multilateral cooperation and partnerships”. Concluding, he noted: “We can be proud of what we have achieved together. Let us also look forward to how we can join forces in the future in favour of prosperity for all.”

The statements of both Secretaries-General followed welcoming and introductory remarks by Mr. Triyono Wibowo, President of the Trade and Development Board, UNCTAD’s governing body, who pointed to three major upcoming opportunities for UNCTAD to accomplish more in the years to come: the articulation of the post-2015 development agenda, the third International Conference on Financing for Development and UNCTAD XIV to be held in 2016.

Statements were also made by the following special invitees: Simonetta Sommaruga, Vice-President of Switzerland, representing UNCTAD’s host country; Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Qatar, representing the host country of UNCTAD XIII, the most recent UNCTAD ministerial meeting held in Doha in 2012; and, by video, Eda Rivas Franchini, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru, representing the host country of UNCTAD XIV, which will take place in Lima.

Ms. Sommaruga noted that sustainable development was not possible if it did not benefit the entire population and underscored the role of human rights. Mr. Al-Kawari emphasized the dominant place of development in UNCTAD's work, while Ms. Rivas Franchini saw UNCTAD as an ally for trade and development issues facing middle-income countries such as Peru.

In statements by member States and other participants, speakers expressed their appreciation for UNCTAD's work and its role as the focal point within the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues, reaffirming their support for the organization.

UNCTAD was more important today than ever before, several speakers felt, because developing countries were still grappling with the aftermath of the crisis of 2008 and also in the face of rising inequalities in society and in the world today.

A number of delegations acknowledged the contribution of the Geneva Dialogues towards definition of a post-2015 development agenda in New York.

Several delegations also expressed appreciation for UNCTAD's work in the areas of technology transfer, finance, trade policies, trade facilitation, investment, commodities and technical assistance.

An estimated 400 people attended the session.

### **Other perspectives on the history of UNCTAD**

On 16 June 2014, 50 years to the day after the historic first meeting concluded in Geneva of what would become the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the organization opened its celebration week with a special event to launch a new volume on the history of UNCTAD, [\*UNCTAD at 50: A Short History\*](#).

The volume's author, economic historian John Toye, though briefly at the UNCTAD secretariat, provided an outsider's perspective and interpretation of the organization's trajectory. Speaking by audio link to the meeting, he described the compromises that had shaped UNCTAD's establishment and stressed the organization's galvanizing effects on the entire international community. The creation of UNCTAD, he said, had spurred the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and others, to adopt a development-oriented policy agenda.

Mr. Toye recalled that among the achievements of the founding Secretary-General of UNCTAD, the esteemed Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, were efforts to set up a mechanism for supplementary financing and tariff preferences for the industrial exports of developing countries which culminated in an agreement to set up the Generalized System of Preferences.

Looking to the future, Mr. Toye said that UNCTAD's contribution should continue to lie in its truly independent macroeconomic research, the value of which was manifest during the economic crisis of 2007/08.

### **Views from special guests**

The special event welcomed three veterans of UNCTAD's beginnings in the 1960s who praised Mr. Toye's work: Julio Lacarte, 96, a negotiator at UNCTAD I and former Minister of Industry and Commerce of Uruguay; Jack Stone, 94, a veteran of UNCTAD II and former Head of UNCTAD's Research Division; and Eugene Koffi Adoboli, 79, who as well as witnessing UNCTAD I worked for the organization and later became Prime Minister of Togo.

Mr. Lacarte emphasized the importance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment held in Havana in 1947/48 – which he attended – as the first time developing countries had ever rallied together to demand the integrated treatment of trade and development.

Mr. Stone, known as the “father of the least developed countries”, discussed the role that UNCTAD had had in identifying the least developed countries and putting forward an integrated policy agenda in their favour.

Mr. Adoboli provided an account of the complex negotiations at UNCTAD I, based on country groupings, as well as important milestones in the history of UNCTAD over the previous 50 years.

## Exploring today's challenges in international trade and development

### Prebisch Round Table

Raúl Prebisch was further remembered at a round table, named in his honour, on the afternoon of the first day. Addressing UNCTAD's contemporary challenges, the discussion was moderated by Jayati Ghosh, Professor of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The debate featured panellists Jan Pronk, Visiting Professor at the United Nations University for Peace, former UNCTAD Deputy Secretary-General and a former Dutch development minister, José Antonio Ocampo, Professor at Columbia University, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and a former Colombian finance minister, and Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

During the discussion, Mr. Kituyi maintained that multilateralism remained important in the face of an overabundance of free trade agreements – both bilateral and megaregional – that threatened to sideline the interests of developing nations, while Mr. Ocampo said that such trade agreements had “killed” multilateralism in trade talks.

Ms. Ghosh questioned then how UNCTAD could thrive in a world without multilateralism, to which Mr. Kituyi responded that the Group of 77 and China bloc of developing countries – formed at UNCTAD I – embodied the role of “custodian” of multilateralism.

Addressing the place of UNCTAD, Mr. Ocampo said the organization had many strengths, including its analytical work on trade and commodities and its work on investment for development. The uniqueness of UNCTAD was the expectation that it should defend the views of developing countries. He noted that UNCTAD should make more use of synergies within the United Nations family and work with United Nations regional commissions.

Responding to reactions from the floor that the 2013 Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization, adopted at its ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia, had been too little, too late, Mr. Pronk replied that Bali showed that reaching an agreement in a multilateral setting was still possible, and this was a hopeful sign that UNCTAD's multilateral approach remained worth pursuing. He reminded the meeting that growth in trade was not an end itself and that human welfare was the ultimate goal.

### Third Geneva Dialogue

The morning of 18 July 2014 saw Mr. Kituyi open the Third Geneva Dialogue with a call to “add dynamism” to the process formulating the post-2015 sustainable development goals.

While the Millennium Development Goals had indicated “what” the main development goals to be achieved were, the future sustainable development goals were expected to focus on “how” to achieve such goals, said Mr. Kituyi. He noted that the “zero draft” on sustainable development goals being prepared by the Open Working Group in New York was placing greater emphasis on the economic dimension of sustainable development and included several references to the contribution of trade.

Participating in the Dialogue were Leonel Fernández Reyna, former President of the Dominican Republic, Pertti Majanen, Ambassador and Co-Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, Claire Melamed, Head of the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Programme of the Overseas Development Institute of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Mr. Al-Kawari.

Mr. Al-Kawari said that mobilizing economic resources would represent a challenge to achieving social goals because sources such as development aid were decreasing, while former President Fernández Reyna noted that transforming trade into a means of implementing the development agenda beyond 2015 was an intensive task that required massive participation from Governments, civil society, private sector and academia. Mr. Majanen pointed to new kinds of cooperation with the private sector to raise funds for sustainable development activities, in addition to traditional sources of financing. A trade agenda which would improve transparency and the coherence of trade, and tackle problems in the global tax system to improve the trading environment, would deliver benefits to people, noted Ms. Melamed.

Some 250 participants – including member States, international organizations and representatives of civil society – attended the meeting and interventions focused on establishing an enabling climate and conditions under

which trade could be used as an effective means of implementation in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. They urged UNCTAD to continue its efforts to connect the Geneva trade community with the post-2015 agenda-setting process in New York.

### **In depth: A focus on mobile money**

On the closing day of the anniversary week, an interactive debate took place on the topic of cutting the costs of remittances. In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, remittances sent from abroad using mobile phone technology – a vital source of money for many developing countries – could enhance financial inclusion. The debate zeroed in on how stakeholders could help make such transactions cheaper.

“The role of remittances as a source of finance is particularly important in the least developed countries where, over the last two decades, remittances have been the second most important source of finance after official development assistance,” Mr. Kituyi said.

The event, chaired by Abdul Hannan, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in Geneva, included interventions by Mr. Kituyi, Universal Postal Union Director-General Bishar A. Hussein, senior representatives from the International Fund for Agricultural Development and from the Bank for International Settlements (Switzerland), as well as private sector entities such as Global Dalberg Development Advisers, the Global System for Mobile Association and Ericsson.

## **Other key activities and reactions**

### **Civil society emphasizes a better world economic order**

The fifth annual UNCTAD Public Symposium brought together, over one and a half days, some 300 stakeholders from civil society and the private sector, parliamentarians, academics and other experts to debate critical issues in the global economy.

Among dozens of speakers were Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organization, Deborah James, Director of International Programmes at the Centre for Economic and Policy Research, Zhongxiu Zhao, Vice-President of the University of International Business and Economics in China, Martin Khor, Executive Director of the South Centre, and representatives of Fair Trade Africa (Kenya), Oxfam (United Kingdom) and Consumer Unity and Trust Society International (India). Ms. Ghosh, Mr. Wibowo, Mr. Ocampo and Ms. Melamed also took part.

The diverse voices gathered by the Symposium discussed the macroeconomic dimensions of inequality and policy practices that could lead to global transformation, among other topics. Several participants noted that civil society played an important role in building political will and they encouraged civil society organizations to reach consensus on alternative solutions that would help Governments.

Day two of the Symposium brought together three Secretaries-General of UNCTAD in a panel discussion: serving Secretary-General Kituyi and his predecessors, Supachai Panitchpakdi (2005–2013) and Rubens Ricupero (1995–2004). Opening the debate, Mr. Kituyi pointed out that the most convincing argument that reducing inequality was central to sustainability was not only the unjustness of inequality, but the fact that it was unproductive. “We also know that we cannot meet the target of ending extreme poverty by 2030, if inequality within countries continues to widen,” he said.

Mr. Supachai pointed out that an obvious way to redistribute income from rich to poor countries was to make it easier and cheaper for migrants to send remittances back home. According to World Bank figures, annual remittance flows to developing countries, at \$350 billion, were almost three times greater than official development aid to developing countries.

Mr. Ricupero said that one way to galvanize multilateral organizations was to bring in civil society, “not just for consultation but for something more organic”.

## Expressing support through culture

A cultural programme including traditional and artistic events as well as a film festival complemented the week's anniversary celebration events.

The Governments of Egypt, Indonesia and the Russian Federation showed their support for UNCTAD through food, traditional dance and an orchestra concert. The United Nations Orchestra also performed on the evening of the first day of week-long celebration.

An African Film Festival screened recent films, often introduced by country representatives, from Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal and Tunisia.

## Recognition from around the globe

Meanwhile, UNCTAD received congratulatory messages from a number of member States including Brazil, China, the Russian Federation and Zimbabwe. United Nations sister agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and the United Nations Office at Geneva forwarded written greetings, while the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization contributed video messages.

Media interest in the events ran high with several outlets running coverage of it including the Inter Press Service news agency, the All Africa news service, the *Gulf Times* of Qatar, *Le Temps* of Switzerland and the *South–North Development Monitor* of Malaysia.

UNCTAD I delegate Ioan Voicu, writing for *The Nation* in Thailand, reminisced that “the fiftieth anniversary of UNCTAD attests to the gradual but universal recognition that international solidarity is the most fitting response to the need for transformations towards equity, sustainability, security and empowerment”.

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of UNCTAD also generated interest on social media, as the number of Twitter followers increased by 3,000 at around this time.

## Other events

Earlier events marking UNCTAD's half-century in 2014 included a panel discussion at the Seventh Astana Economic Forum in May where Mr. Kituyi joined eminent discussants, including former Prime Minister of Italy and tenth President of the European Commission Romano Prodi and Nobel Prize-winning economist Christopher Pissarides, and a symposium hosted by the Government of Indonesia in April at which Mr. Kituyi evoked the first ever large-scale conference organized by and for developing countries, in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955.

Celebrating their respective half-century anniversaries in June 2014, the International Trade Centre launched the book, *Aid for Trade: What have we learnt? Which way ahead?*, and the Group of 77 and China held a high-level meeting in Bolivia.

Finally, at the end of the anniversary week, a day of discussions was held to consider the special development problems faced by small island developing States.

Organized by the Permanent Mission of Barbados to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, the event looked forward to the third United Nations Conference on Small Island Developing States taking place in Samoa in September 2014.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Kituyi said that UNCTAD's aim was to answer the United Nations request “to consider the improved and additional measures that might be needed to address more effectively the unique and particular vulnerabilities and development needs of small island developing States”.

## Next steps

The oversight body of UNCTAD, the Trade and Development Board, will continue celebrating the organization's anniversary when it meets for its sixty-first annual session on 15–26 September 2014, while the World Investment Forum, UNCTAD's high-level, biennial multi-stakeholder conference that facilitates dialogue and action with respect to the world's key emerging investment-related challenges, will add its voice to UNCTAD's anniversary celebration on 13–16 October 2014. Both events will take place in Geneva.