



Agenda item: 7

General debate

Statement by:

Afghanistan on behalf of G77 and China



UNITED NATIONS
UNCTAD



**GROUP OF 77 & CHINA
G E N E V A**

As of 20 September 2021

**Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China
by His Excellency Mr. Nasir Ahmad Andisha
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
at the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNCTAD 15**

General debate

President of the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,
Secretary-General of UNCTAD Ms. Rebeca Grynspan,
Distinguished dignitaries,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As we gather in virtual Barbados, our Group would like to express its utmost gratitude to the government and the people of Barbados for their commitment to UNCTAD and to the fairer world it stands for.
2. In mid-September 2021 we reached a year and a half into the pandemic. Back in March 2020 we did not fully grasp the unprecedented impact that the pandemic would create, wiping development advances achieved over many years and setting us back up to two decades in some cases.
3. While we have experienced several economic crises and shocks over the last couple of decades, it is clear that no contemporary crisis has had such an unequal effect, with the poorest and most vulnerable suffering most. Indeed, developing countries suffered the brunt of the damage due to comparatively less resilient health sectors, fewer resources and limited access to medicines and medical equipment. Moreover, the sanitary impact of the pandemic was compounded by the economic impact on developing countries, which exacerbated existing economic vulnerabilities. All the while, developing countries were unable to put in place stimulus packages similar of those of developed countries. All these factors provide for the uneven economic recovery that we see today, with advanced economies being close to pre-pandemic GDP levels and developing countries lagging behind.
4. Most importantly, even as we gather here at UNCTAD 15, developing countries continue to face limited access to vaccines, record high levels of unsustainable debt, commodity-dependence, food insecurity, persistent unemployment, increasing inequality and, for the first time in years, increasing poverty. Recovery will remain elusive for some time, in particular as many of the industries that developing countries rely on have not fully recovered, such is the case of the tourism sector.
5. Yet even before the pandemic, developing countries were suffering disproportionately from a series of challenges, including uneven effects of climate change, natural and manmade disasters, effects of unilateral coercive measures, prevalence of health-related shocks and constraints, as well as important strains imposed by massive flows of refugees, 85% of whom are hosted in developing countries.

6. The Group of 77 and China also reiterates its deep concern over the long-standing occupation of the Palestinian territory, which prevents the Palestinian people from harnessing their natural resources. This costs the Palestinian people billions of dollars in unrealized economic potential. Moreover, the economic costs of occupation and the leakage of Palestinian fiscal resources to the Israeli treasury impose enormous costs on the Palestinian people, which is estimated by UNCTAD to be much higher than 13% of Palestinian GDP. The economic costs of occupation and the inability of the Palestinian people, under occupation, to utilize their natural resources, make it extremely difficult for the Palestinian government to make tangible progress towards achieving the SDGs and the international community's commitment to building an independent and viable Palestinian State.

7. With this scenario in mind, the Group of 77 and China comes to UNCTAD with the conviction of its rightful place as the main stakeholder of UNCTAD. The challenges that we faced in 1964 are more relevant than ever as we strive to build a better world, just as we did almost six decades ago. We therefore do not merely aspire for returning to the pre-pandemic status quo, but to be able to seize the opportunity to build a better post-pandemic world.

8. One of the cornerstones of building such a better world is, in the view of our Group, having the UNCTAD 15 outcome put UNCTAD back at the center of development thinking, to identify global solutions to the long standing and pervasive development problems that we face. A strong UNCTAD 15 outcome should recognize the need to transform multilateralism for development, the need to enhance the voice and participation of developing countries, to reaffirm multilateralism and to avoid any sort of unilateralism that hinders development.

9. UNCTAD 15 must also recognize the need to work on a multilateral trading system that works for development, the urgent need for a durable solution to the debt issue, the existential need for global climate action, carried in a way that recognizes the historical responsibilities for the emissions in the atmosphere.

10. While the Covid-19 pandemic has rendered the need for tackling these challenges more urgent than ever, it has also provided an opportunity in abolishing outdated taboos about the role of the State. The need for a stronger role for the State in the economy and for development is indeed an idea that the Group of 77 and China has consistently supported throughout its history.

11. Nevertheless, our work does not stop at an outcome document, our Group believes in an UNCTAD that is the pre-eminent forum to consider development questions and identify solutions. It is therefore paramount that we strive to reinstate the role of UNCTAD as a negotiating forum for trade and development questions, so that we can build on the Bridgetown Covenant over the next four years.

12. As we approach the 60th anniversary of UNCTAD and of the Group of 77 and China, it is incumbent upon us that we ensure that UNCTAD is fit-for-purpose and suited to our aspirations. The appointment of a new Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, who our Group wholeheartedly welcomes, provides a further opportunity for the pursuit of our ambitious, yet fully legitimate and even necessary, aspirations.

13. We in the Group of 77 and China trust that our development partners will accompany us in this pursuit. In the current context, we have affirmed that the pandemic will only be over once it is over everywhere. Similarly, our struggle for development will only be finished once we eradicate poverty and achieve prosperity for all, and we therefore cannot rest until we can be certain that nobody has been left behind.

14. We therefore trust that the UNCTAD 15 outcome can live up to our expectations and aspirations and that we will be able to see the Bridgetown Covenant as a major milestone in development and on the road to the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Thank you, Madame President.