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The Bridgetown Accord

Creative Industries and Trade Digitalization Forum

The consultative organizing committee of the inaugural Creative Industries and Trade Digitalization Forum, held in the lead up to the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 15), hosted by Barbados,

Celebrating the historic significance of UNCTAD 15 as the first of its kind to be hosted by a Caribbean country and a small island developing State, the first to be delivered in a virtual format, due to the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and the first to showcase the growing synergies between the creative industries and the digitalization of trade in a single Forum,

Noting that the theme of UNCTAD 15, “From inequality and vulnerability to prosperity for all”, builds on the Nairobi Maafikiano, adopted at the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which highlights the critical importance of moving from decision to action in ensuring inclusive economic growth for the well-being of all populations,

Acknowledging that the world urgently requires concrete action in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular a meaningful and measurable reduction in inequality and vulnerability by ensuring trade works for all and development remains a priority on the global agenda,

Recognizing that the UNCTAD foundational mission is to promote sustainable development, gender and social justice, human rights, environmental protection and an equitable international economic order in the conduct of trade relations,

Embracing the need to re-imagine and rewrite the rules of the game for global trade and development against the backdrop of the existential crises gripping the world, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and rising inequality and vulnerability, all of which are causing untold harm to cultures, societies, economies, communities and people, particularly the middle- and low-income households of the global South and small island developing States,

Mindful that the United Nations declared 2021 as the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development in an effort to optimize the economic, social and cultural benefits of the creative economy by building a more equitable enabling environment for its promotion, including development of the digital economy, digital technologies, national, regional and global systems of innovation, electronic commerce frameworks, digital



infrastructure and connectivity, public and private sector investment models and more inclusive legal frameworks,

Conscious that the UNCTAD *Digital Economy Report 2021* identifies the expansion of data flows as critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and that those data flows are dominated by just two countries, which account for almost 90 per cent of the market capitalization of the world's largest digital platforms,

Highlighting the limited capacity of the countries of the global South to turn data into measurable social and economic value, a clear disadvantage at a time of accelerating digitalization that is impacting all aspects of human existence,

Conceding that while the creative economy accounts for 3 per cent of global gross domestic product, colonial trade networks continue to persist globally, exacerbating historical imbalances in the cultural, creative and technological sectors that remain extremely pervasive and deeply embedded in the social, cultural, economic, political and knowledge systems of the world,

Call on countries of the global North and UNCTAD member States to acknowledge the inequality at the root of the cultural, creative and technological systems of the world and the need to identify more inclusive ways of industrializing creativity, technology and innovation for a more equitable future.

Contribution

In particular, during three days of substantive deliberations, the organizers, contributors and participants of the Creative Industries and Trade Digitalization Forum observed and affirmed that:

- (a) Inequality is historically rooted and embedded in the contemporary global design;
- (b) The digital divide and prevailing imbalances in the trade of creative and digital goods and services are not being ameliorated by current approaches as rapidly as is necessary for the global South to benefit from the data-driven digital economy;
- (c) Existing strategies that focus on helping entrepreneurs from the global South gain access to global markets in the cultural, creative and technological sectors lack the critical mass of financial and developmental backing required to equalize the existing and growing imbalances;
- (d) Culture, creativity and technology cannot be addressed in isolation from each other if the world is to achieve greater prosperity and inclusion for all.

Recommendations

Nevertheless, we believe opportunities exist to rebalance the contemporary global design, particularly through a rethinking and re-imagining of culture, creativity and the production and application of new technologies and digital platforms.

We call on UNCTAD to:

- (a) Commit and contribute to the centring of culture as a driver of trade, development and national and regional systems of innovation;
- (b) Recognize, acknowledge and address the historical, embedded and deeply rooted nature of global inequality, particularly as it relates to the development of cultural, creative and technological systems and their linkages to the globalization of trade;
- (c) Place greater emphasis on the social and developmental benefits of the creative and technological sectors;

(d) Galvanize the support of the world's big-technology firms to capitalize an innovation fund aimed at financing the development and commercialization of content and solutions emerging from small island developing States and from the global South.

We call on the host country Barbados and the wider Caribbean to:

(a) Centre the understanding of persistent inequality at the root of global systems and structures when formulating policies and strategies for the growth of the region's cultural, creative and technological sectors;

(b) Recognize culture as a pillar of development and the nurturing of creativity as central to the building of national and regional systems of technological innovation;

(c) Reconceptualize the idea of the creative industries, a term that emerged from and for the global North, in ways that consider the peculiar national and regional realities of the Caribbean, including the understanding that national and regional financing and enterprise development ecosystems must be designed to facilitate the emergence and commercialization of good ideas, content, creations, solutions and indigenous technology platforms;

(d) Form and financially support a regional body to promote and nurture the development of culture fuelled by people's creative imaginations and emerging digital technologies;

(e) Sanction and financially support governmental, academic and private sector partnerships for research into and the development of the economic and social potential at the intersections of the creative sector and technological digitalization.

We commend UNCTAD and the Government of Barbados for their foresight in mounting this inaugural Creative Industries and Trade Digitalization Forum.

We believe the unprecedented disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, both of which are exacerbating inequalities and creating significant levels of dislocation in communities around the world, also creates opportunities to recognize and redress long-standing injustices at the heart of the world's existing social, economic and technological order.

We call on UNCTAD and its member States to endorse the Bridgetown Accord as a means of recognizing and rebalancing historically rooted contemporary global injustices such that the countries of the global South are better positioned to benefit from fair trade governed by equitable rules of the game, balanced economic development and reparative transfers of sustainable value.

We fully endorse the institutionalization by UNCTAD of a Creative Industries and Trade Digitalization Forum as a standing forum of all future quadrennial conferences.