



# United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General  
28 November 2025

Original: English

---

## Sixteenth session

Geneva

20–23 October 2025

Item 8

**Shaping the future: Driving economic transformation  
for equitable, inclusive and sustainable development**

## Reimagining trade: A broader path to development

### Ministerial round table

#### Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. In her opening remarks, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD reaffirmed that trade remained a fundamental driver of development, particularly for small and vulnerable economies. She noted that the global trading environment faced unprecedented pressures from increasing policy uncertainty, volatile tariffs and declining predictability, yet emphasized the resilience of the system, with robust growth in services and South–South trade, even as participation by the least developed countries in global trade remained limited. The Secretary-General noted that reimagining trade did not mean a return to the status quo but should involve a commitment to reform grounded in common, predictable and fair rules. She stressed the need for special and differential treatment that met the needs of developing countries and noted that emerging sustainability and digital standards should not become de facto trade barriers. Finally, she highlighted the importance of inclusive dialogue in building a trading system that was equitable, transparent and responsive to shared development aspirations.

2. The round table featured nine panellists: Minister of International Trade, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Minister of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Nepal; Minister Delegate for Francophonie, International Partnerships and French Nationals Abroad, France; Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Poland; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica; Minister of Economy, Mozambique; Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh; Vice-Minister of Trade and Integration, Kazakhstan; and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD moderated the discussion, examining two central questions in each of two panels.

3. The first panel addressed the following questions: What are some of the main challenges in achieving the potential to benefit from and contribute to a sustainable world? Can international trade serve as a catalyst for creating youth employment and sustainable development? In what ways is global cooperation more important and how can the international trading system be strengthened, to support sustainable development? What key principles and elements does the rules-based global trading system need to uphold in order to ensure inclusivity, resilience and support for sustainable development worldwide? How



should this system be adapted to current challenges? What is the role of UNCTAD, particularly in terms of aligning national trade policies with the global trading system?

4. One panellist noted that despite rich natural resources, economic progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained constrained by dependence on extractive industries. He noted the need for diversification into other sectors, including agriculture, supported by significant infrastructure investment, and reaffirmed openness to foreign direct investment.

5. Another panellist addressed recent domestic conflicts and the importance of human capital investment in Nepal, as a landlocked country, to develop the local economy and international trade. He emphasized regional integration and participation in global trade as equally essential pathways towards achieving sustainable development.

6. One panellist reaffirmed the commitment of France to multilateralism and to reforming the global trading system in line with ecological and digital transitions. She noted the need for an integrated approach across the Sustainable Development Goals and for institutions that promoted accountability, efficiency and regional cooperation.

7. Another panellist shared lessons from Poland on sustained growth, crediting openness and a rules-based system. He advised that the erosion of trade rules and unchecked competition could harm all economies and noted the need for World Trade Organization reform and renewed regional cooperation.

8. The second panel addressed the following questions: How can national trade policies support development and inclusivity? What are the opportunities with regard to services trade? How does uncertainty in the global trading system impact the use of national trade policies for development? How can the trade agenda promote export growth that drives broader sustainable development outcomes? Which policies are required in order for trade to contribute to socially inclusive employment outcomes and environmentally sustainable development? Given trade as a driving force in growth and development, how can momentum be sustained? How can UNCTAD support the alignment of the multilateral trade agenda with development priorities?

9. One panellist outlined efforts to expand the digital services sector and reduce economic vulnerability through infrastructure development, entrepreneurship support and the modernization of logistics and customs systems. She described the integrated approach in Jamaica that linked trade diversification, broadband infrastructure and human capital development.

10. Another panellist noted that the multilateral trading system faced existential challenges as major economies pursued self-interested reforms and such uncertainty discouraged investment in the least developed countries. He described efforts in Mozambique to diversify into tourism, energy and communications, supported by training and UNCTAD technical assistance.

11. One panellist emphasized the need to integrate sustainability into trade agreements in order to foster resilient, technology-enabled value chains. She highlighted transparent data-sharing, the empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises and public-private partnerships as essential in inclusive growth and job creation.

12. Another panellist discussed the challenges related to graduation from the least developed country category, including higher financing costs, loss of preferential access and increasing non-tariff barriers. He expressed confidence in the productive labour force in Bangladesh and outlined a strategy focused on trade liberalization, logistics improvement and diversification.

13. One panellist highlighted the tenth anniversary of the accession of Kazakhstan to the World Trade Organization, noting that membership had strengthened predictability, competitiveness, standards and market access. She emphasized that diversification beyond raw materials remained a priority and that Kazakhstan, as a landlocked country, continued to face significant transit-related constraints.

14. During the ensuing discussion, the panellists stated that UNCTAD should guide reforms that strengthened inclusivity, sustainability and predictability in the multilateral

trading system, while enabling developing countries to diversify and integrate more effectively into the global economy. The panellists agreed that achieving development through trade required solidarity, investment in people and a balance between global rules and local realities.

---