



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

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Geneva

20–23 October 2025

Plenary meeting with the Secretary-General of the United Nations

High-level event

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. In opening the high-level event, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD recalled that UNCTAD was established in Geneva more than 60 years ago to make the principles of the United Nations tangible for developing countries that sought integration into the global economy. She emphasized that the mission of UNCTAD continued to be relevant as the world faced trade uncertainty, high debt levels and rising fragmentation. As part of its role, UNCTAD supported building the kind of predictability that enabled long-term investment, genuine structural transformation and development for stability and for prosperity to work together. She mentioned, as an example, that UNCTAD had contributed substantively to the Global Crisis Response Group, launched in March 2022 and chaired by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which had identified systemic fragilities before they became front-page news.

2. Addressing the sixteenth session of the Conference, the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that development required deliberate action and should deliver justice for the developing world for trade and through trade. He noted, though, that trade alone was not enough. Trade also required institutions that set policies, rules and a level playing field, as well as finance, investments and technology, that could help all countries participate and prosper and should serve their people. He recalled the many achievements of UNCTAD over decades that had helped steer the global trade system towards justice. He cited as examples the creation of the least developed countries category, the adoption of the principles and objectives for a New International Economic Order and the establishment of the Common Fund for Commodities. He further noted ongoing work to close gaps in the global trading system and propose concrete solutions, as well as long-standing calls to reform the international financial architecture. Yet developing countries continued to be shortchanged, with some least developed countries facing exorbitant tariffs of 40 per cent, despite representing barely 1 per cent of global trade flows. Against that backdrop, he underscored four priority areas for action.

3. First, he called for a fair global trade and investment system, grounded in the Pact for the Future, that would support export-led growth, special and differential treatment for developing countries and reform of the World Trade Organization. Developing economies should be enabled to move beyond commodity dependence and benefit from the explosive growth in services.



4. Second, a reform of financing for development was needed in a world where 3.4 billion people lived in countries that spent more on debt servicing than on health or education. He underscored furthermore the consensus reached at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development held in Sevilla and called for action to unlock more finance for developing countries, triple the lending power of multilateral development banks, leverage private finance and ease debt burdens.

5. Third, he emphasized the importance of technology and digital inclusion and urged delegations to move forward on the implementation of the Global Digital Compact to close digital divides and ensure that frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, were accessible to all countries, not just the wealthy few.

6. Finally, the Secretary-General of the United Nations drew attention to the need to align trade and climate goals and encouraged countries to integrate trade strategies into national climate plans and to mobilize 1.3 trillion dollars a year in climate finance by 2035 for developing countries. He recalled the Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals that he had established and which was aimed at ensuring that resource extraction benefited local communities.

7. The following high-level speakers made statements as coordinators of negotiating groups: the representative of Peru, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; the representative of the European Union, on behalf of the European Union and its member States; the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of the JUSSCANNZ group; and the representative of the Russian Federation, on behalf of the Eurasian Economic Union.

8. The first representative highlighted that the current multidimensional global crisis, marked by geopolitical tensions, climate change and technological divides, had deepened inequality and constrained access to finance. Those challenges disproportionately affected developing countries. UNCTAD played a central role in the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, through policy analysis, technical cooperation and multilateral dialogue with a development-oriented approach. On behalf of his regional group, he called for reform of the international financial architecture to ensure fair, predictable and unconditional financing and warned against new forms of protectionism under the guise of climate policies. He stressed that UNCTAD should remain an essential technical and political voice that promoted structural transformation and development based on sustainable industrialization, poverty reduction and the equitable integration of all countries into the global economy.

9. Another representative reaffirmed that currently and, more than ever, multilateralism and open, constructive dialogue were needed. She expressed the firm commitment of her regional group to supporting effective multilateralism and a rules-based international order, with the United Nations at its core and stood with UNCTAD in the mission to build bridges, while also backing the reform initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. She further noted that, through the Global Gateway Initiative, her regional group was contributing to contribute to accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in alignment with the Paris Agreement and work of United Nations agencies.

10. Another representative described trade as a powerful engine of development, poverty reduction and shared prosperity, with a \$1 increase in trade associated with a \$1.44 increase in gross domestic product. On behalf of his regional group, he called for a revitalized multilateral trading system with a reformed World Trade Organization that worked for all and was supported by a dynamic and modern UNCTAD.

11. The final representative underlined that UNCTAD remained one of the key forums in the United Nations system concerning trade and development. He stressed the importance of equal, non-discriminatory and open multilateral trade and noted that regional integration within his regional group contributed to sustainable development, by diversifying trade, countering external shocks and strengthening cooperation. He further emphasized the need for careful use of national resources and preservation of the environment. He expressed the hope that the outcome of the sixteenth session of the Conference would significantly contribute to strengthening the role of UNCTAD as a

platform for expert analysis and productive exchange of opinions, as well as the implementation of specific programmes and initiatives that would serve as a catalyst for global cooperation.
