**United Nations Conference on Trade and Development**

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# ASYCUDA: New technology to foster efficient, secure and sustainable trade

## Parallel event

## Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1.      In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD emphasized that technological progress offered tools to shape trade systems that were more resilient, transparent and inclusive. The Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) Programme, as the cornerstone of UNCTAD technical cooperation work, supported over 100 economies in digitalizing customs operations, enhancing institutional capacity and promoting transparency. The Deputy Secretary-General highlighted measurable results, demonstrating that ASYCUDA-supported reforms had significantly increased customs revenues, improved clearance efficiency and reduced administrative costs across participating economies.

2.      In his keynote address, the Minister of Economy, Industry, Investment and Economic Integration, the Comoros, underscored that for small island developing States, digitalization was indispensable to resilience and participation in global markets. The Minister highlighted that ASYCUDA implementation and the creation of a national single window had strengthened governance and transparency. The system had ensured the continuity of essential trade flows during the pandemic and had improved food safety and inspection capacity by 30 per cent. The Minister noted the need for stronger multilateral partnerships to help the least developed countries and small island developing States build inclusive digital ecosystems aligned with regional trade frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

3.      The parallel event, following opening remarks by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and a keynote address by the Minister of Economy, Industry, Investment and Economic Integration, the Comoros, featured four panellists: Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations Office at Geneva; Deputy Director General, General Department of Customs and Excise, Cambodia; Director, Postal Operations, Universal Postal Union; and Global Policy Lead, Customs, International Chamber of Commerce. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat moderated the discussion.

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4. A representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the evolution of ASYCUDA over four decades, highlighting its transformation from a trade statistics tool to a global platform for customs automation and trade facilitation. ASYCUDA New Generation, a cloud-based, open-source and modular system was officially launched; the platform introduced advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and integrated applications, including version 5 for customs management; the Asyhub platform for pre-arrival and pre-departure data exchanges; the electronic Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, for environmental compliance matters; and the Automated System for Relief Consignments, for humanitarian logistics coordination.

5. One panellist highlighted how ASYCUDA helped landlocked developing countries overcome geographical and logistical barriers. In Mongolia, the system had improved transparency, reduced bureaucracy and extended digital trade services to remote areas, thereby empowering women and youth entrepreneurs.

6. Another panellist noted the importance of political commitment and coordination for successful reform. Since implementing ASYCUDA in 2008, Cambodia had transitioned to ASYCUDA World, achieving full paperless customs clearance in 2024. The panellist cited the roll-out of Asyhub and the development of a national single window connecting 13 agencies as milestones. He attributed progress to effective information and communications technology strategies and close collaboration with development partners.

7. One panellist underscored the significance of interoperability between postal and customs systems in accelerating cross-border electronic commerce. Integration between the Universal Postal Union customs declaration system and ASYCUDA had reduced average clearance times from eight to four days. The panellist stated that automation improved compliance and delivery efficiency while ensuring adherence to fiscal and security standards.

8. Another panellist emphasized the role of the private sector in advancing digital standards and interoperability. Through the digital standards initiative of the International Chamber of Commerce, efforts were under way to align regulatory and commercial data systems, reducing duplication, transaction costs and procedural delays. The panellist underlined that the responsible use of artificial intelligence, transparent data governance and integrity frameworks were essential to building trust in digital trade systems.

9. During the ensuing discussion, several delegates and one participant expressed appreciation for the Programme's contribution to customs modernization and capacity-building. Some delegates sought clarification on the time frame and prerequisites for adopting ASYCUDA New Generation. One delegate and one participant commended the Programme's role in promoting peer-learning and regional cooperation. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat noted that implementation would be tailored to national priorities and institutional readiness and that partnership models would continue to support countries in fragile contexts. Many participants underlined that digital transformation delivered lasting value only when accompanied by institutional strengthening, human capital development and sustained cooperation between Governments and partners. There was broad consensus that shaping the future of trade required enabling every economy, large or small, coastal or landlocked, to harness innovation as a catalyst for inclusive, secure and sustainable development.

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