



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

Australia



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Secretary-General, Heads of State, Ministers and Distinguished Colleagues,

Australia thanks Switzerland and the city of Geneva for hosting the sixteenth session of United Nations Trade and Development.

Today we meet in the very place where UNCTAD began 60 years ago, inspired by the core principle that open and rules-based trade is vital for sustainable development and shared prosperity.

As the international community moves to renew and reform our collective institutions for the decades ahead, this Conference provides a timely opportunity to consider how UNCTAD can most efficiently deliver on its core mandate to promote sustainable development through trade.

Across its three pillars of research and analysis, consensus-building, and technical cooperation, UNCTAD has an important role to play in assisting countries to navigate complex global challenges, strengthen their economic resilience, and pursue inclusive and sustainable growth.

With just over four years remaining to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Australia calls on UNCTAD to strategically target efforts towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure no one is left behind. And recognise – as the 2030 Agenda does – that for development to be sustainable, it must balance economic growth, environmental protection and social development.

Colleagues,

We acknowledge that multilateralism is facing significant challenges and there are flaws which must be addressed, but that does not detract from the value of global cooperation. The UN80 reform agenda underscores the need for a more focussed, coherent and effective UN system.

As Australia has emphasised, the primary responsibility for achieving this lies with Member States. The UN Secretary-General's reports are clear: across the UN system, we continue to create new mandates with little regard to cost, impact, fragmentation or duplication. This Conference is an opportunity for purposeful reform and prioritisation of effort toward collective goals on which UNCTAD is best placed to deliver.

Our regional group's longstanding position on the need to reform UNCTAD's intergovernmental machinery is rooted in a commitment to strengthening UNCTAD. We

must ensure that UNCTAD can deliver on its consensus pillar, address emerging priorities, and meaningfully engage Member states, particularly smaller Missions, across the breadth of work.

Australia remains steadfast in our recognition that sustainable development is a global endeavour. At a time of tightening budgets and global uncertainty, Australia is committed to sustainable growth of our development assistance. And we continue to work in partnership to deliver an effective, accountable, and responsive development program that is fit for contemporary challenges and opportunities.

As a development partner that listens closely to partner priorities and needs, and explores new and innovative finance for development, Australia recognises UNCTAD's contribution to research and policy thinking in this area. We encourage UNCTAD to bolster the strength of its research and analysis by ensuring that it is impartial, evidence-based and peer-reviewed.

While we are a proud development partner, we also recognise that public and grant-based finance alone is not enough. We must also mobilise private financing. Australia urges UNCTAD to continue its vital technical assistance in supporting domestic resource mobilisation and helping countries drive their own sustainable development.

At a time of increasing challenges to the multilateral system, strengthening the rules-based order is more important than ever before. This includes deepening the integration of developing countries in an open, rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. Australia thanks UNCTAD for its vital role in supporting Timor-Leste and Comoros throughout their recent WTO accessions, through research, technical assistance and capacity building.

Secretary-General,

Australia urges UNCTAD to continue integrating gender equality objectives, in recognition that inclusive and sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full participation of people of all genders.

The Australian Government's commitment to gender equality is embedded across our foreign and development policy. In our region, Australia's Pacific Women Lead initiative has invested \$170 million to improve opportunities for the political, economic and social advancement of women in 14 Pacific Island countries.

As a core donor of UNCTAD's eTrade for Women initiative, we are proud to have funded its expansion into South and Southeast Asia, supporting women-led digital business in our region to connect and grow.

Australia welcomes UNCTAD's continued work on supporting the digital economy to drive inclusive and sustainable development, including through its role as co-lead on the implementation of the Global Digital Compact in the areas of data governance and inclusive digital economy.

Secretary-General,

Integrating environmental priorities across all UNCTAD policies, programs and research outputs is more critical than ever. This includes our shared commitment to the multilateral system by working collectively to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and keep 1.5°C within reach.

Australia stands shoulder to shoulder with the Pacific family, for whom climate change poses not just an environmental, but existential threat. Our bid to host COP31 next year in partnership with the Pacific is an opportunity to amplify the voices of the enduring custodians of our lands and ocean.

As the Pacific's largest development partner, Australia listens and responds, committing at least half of all new bilateral and regional investments over \$3 million to having a climate objective, with a goal of reaching 80% in 2028-2029.

We encourage UNCTAD to continue its analytical work in supporting developing countries to leverage financial resources to build climate-resilient and sustainable economies. By the end of this year, Australia will offer Climate-Resilient Debt Clauses in all new sovereign loans, allowing our partners to pause debt repayments in the event of disasters. This approach supports disaster recovery, reduces the risk of debt distress and enables countries to focus on delivering for their citizens.

Secretary-General,

Let me close by reiterating that trade is an opportunity, not for leverage or strategic gain, but to achieve sustainable and long-term prosperity for all. As multilateral institutions face increasing challenges, it is incumbent upon us, the Member States, to ensure that our work remains aligned with the 2030 Agenda which guides our efforts.

Australia stands ready to continue working constructively with all UNCTAD Members, the Secretary-General and the Secretariat, to reform and focus UNCTAD work over the coming four-year period.

Thank you.