



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

South Centre





Statement to the UNCTAD XVI
23 October 2025, Geneva, Switzerland

Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The South Centre, as the intergovernmental organisation of developing countries, congratulates UNCTAD and its Member States on convening this sixteenth Conference under the theme *“Shaping the Future: Driving Economic Transformation for Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development.”*

This Conference marks sixty-one years since the establishment of UNCTAD, an institution created to advance development-oriented international cooperation and promote the equitable integration of developing countries into the world economy.

UNCTAD XVI takes place at a moment of profound strain on multilateralism and growing fragmentation in global economic relations. Deepening inequalities, unsustainable debt, climate crises, and unilateral trade measures continue to erode trust in cooperation. For developing countries, recovery from successive global shocks remains fragile, constrained by limited fiscal space, rising capital costs, and restricted access to technology and markets.

UNCTAD’s integrated work across research, consensus-building, and technical cooperation in trade, finance, investment, technology and sustainable development remains vital to restoring balance in the global economy. UNCTAD must remain anchored in its development mandate. Without it, the institution risks losing its direction and distinct contribution to the UN system.

The South Centre supports the renewed commitment in the draft outcome text to strengthen multilateral cooperation, prevent economic fragmentation, and build a fairer and more inclusive international economic order. We also encourage UNCTAD to deepen its analysis of international financial flows, including investment, development assistance, debt servicing and the impact of unilateral coercive measures.

UNCTAD XVI should reaffirm that South–South cooperation is a pillar of solidarity and a vital complement to North–South cooperation, grounded in equality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty.

UNCTAD should deepen its analytical and technical work on the reform of the multilateral trading system to support developing Members in engaging effectively in WTO processes while upholding their right to development. The South Centre welcomes the recognition of development as the organising principle of the WTO and hopes this commitment will be retained in the final outcome. We affirm that Special and Differential Treatment is a binding rule of the multilateral trading system, integral to its legal architecture and indispensable for fairness and effective participation.

We further encourage UNCTAD to expand its work on trade diversification, industrial strategy, and the links between trade, debt, and productive investment to reinforce policy coherence for sustainable and inclusive growth.

The South Centre commends the inclusion of the digital economy cluster in the negotiating text, which recognises both opportunities and risks. UNCTAD must continue to:

- Support developing countries through e-Trade Readiness Assessments and follow-up implementation.
- Deepen analytical work on digital trade agreements that promote inclusive digitalisation and preserve national policy space.



- Advance cooperation on data governance consistent with the Global Digital Compact.
- Build capacity on artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, focusing on ethics, accountability, and inclusion.

The South Centre stands ready to assist developing countries in formulating national and regional digital industrial strategies that advance digital sovereignty, strengthen productive capacities, and align with the Global Digital Compact.

More generally, the South Centre will continue to serve as the policy and knowledge platform for the Global South.
