



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

Third World Network



Statement of the Third World Network at UNCTAD16 General Debate

23 October 2025

Chair, Excellencies, friends and colleagues,

Thank you for the floor. I have the privilege of speaking on behalf of the Third World Network, an independent research organization from the global South drawing on its long engagement with UNCTAD and working with developing-country negotiators and communities. Our message is simple: the world needs a strong, independent, and development-oriented UNCTAD, one that speaks truth to power, protects policy space, and equips developing countries with the tools to transform their economies and societies in just, equitable and sustainable ways.

UNCTAD's comparative advantage has always been its integrated treatment of trade and development and the interrelated issues of finance, technology, investment, climate, and structural transformation. That vantage point is not a luxury; it is a necessity at a time of overlapping crises such as debt distress, commodity shocks, financial volatility, accelerating digitalization, and climate change impacts that are already eroding development gains. When other institutions default to orthodoxy, with their policy prescriptions of pro-cyclical austerity, rapid deregulation, and a narrow reading of "openness", we call on UNCTAD to remain the heterodox counterweight with its rigorous, evidence-based, and unapologetically developmental orientation that seeks to reflect and respond to the realities and lived experiences of the global South.

For us, UNCTAD's role rests on three mutually reinforcing pillars.

First, policy analysis and advice. UNCTAD should continue to challenge conventional wisdom and illuminate options that mainstream orthodox advice too often ignores: active industrial policy and strategic trade tools; development-oriented competition policy to tackle concentration and digital monopolies; capital account management and macro-prudential measures to tame volatile flows; public development banking and mission-oriented investment to drive diversification; and measures that address commodity dependence by moving up value chains. On climate and sustainability, UNCTAD should analyze how unilateral trade measures, such as border adjustments and due-diligence regimes, interact with development trajectories, and propose multilateral, equitable alternatives that respect common but differentiated responsibilities and the right to development.

Second, technical cooperation builds endogenous capacity and does not impose conditionality. Assistance must strengthen national institutions to design and implement

investment and industrial strategies; negotiate fairer trade and investment agreements; develop national sustainability and traceability systems that work for smallholders and MSMEs; and harness the digital economy while safeguarding data sovereignty and competition. This cooperation should be country-owned, demand-driven, and explicitly geared to reducing asymmetries in technology, finance, and market power.

Third, consensus-building and norm development. UNCTAD is the UN's venue where the Global South has sought to shape international economic rules and principles that reflect development realities. It should help members elaborate norms that secure meaningful special and differential treatment; protect regulatory and industrial policy space in trade and investment frameworks; promote fair, development-led digital rules; and align trade with climate and biodiversity objectives without shifting adjustment burdens onto developing countries. UNCTAD should also advance systemic solutions to debt and finance, including support for comprehensive debt workout mechanisms, fair credit rating practices, and scaling of long-term concessional finance, so that trade policy is not undermined by macro-financial fragility.

To fulfill this mission, three conditions are essential.

One, safeguard UNCTAD's mandate and research independence. Efforts to narrow UNCTAD into a technical assistance provider, detached from critical analysis and norm-setting, should be resisted. Developing countries need an institution that can diagnose structural problems, not just manage their symptoms.

Two, resource UNCTAD adequately and predictably. Core funding should allow sustained flagship work, its critical Trade and Development Reports, technology and investment monitoring, climate-trade interface analysis, and the scale-up of advisory support that developing countries look for.

Three, deepen meaningful participation. UNCTAD's credibility grows when it engages governments across ministries, domestic stakeholders, including workers, small producers, and indigenous communities, and civil society organizations that bring grounded evidence and accountability. Participation must be timely, structured, and substantive.

To conclude, UNCTAD should remain true to its long-standing mission of anchoring its work in solidarity with developing countries' quest for structural transformation, decent work, ecological resilience, and policy autonomy. A confident UNCTAD, heterodox in methods and analysis, pragmatic in practice, and principled in purpose, can help deliver that future.

Thank you.