



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

Republic of Korea



Statement by H.E. Kim Hee-sang
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on the Occasion of the 16th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade
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Mr. Chairman, Federal Councillor Parmelin,
Secretary-General Grynspar,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to address this conference at a time of complex global challenges. In such moments, we are reminded that equitable, inclusive, and sustainable growth must remain the foundation of our solutions for the future.

This session is not only a reunion after the pandemic, but also a renewal of purpose — reaffirming UNCTAD's central role in guiding global economic cooperation during this period of transition.

For more than six decades, UNCTAD has embodied the belief that trade and investment are not merely instruments of commerce, but engines of shared prosperity. Yet today, as global fragmentation threatens to slow this engine, we must reignite it with renewed commitment and collective resolve.

Trade and investment — the very core of UNCTAD's mandate — remain the most reliable drivers of sustainable growth. They connect markets, spread technology, and create opportunities, especially for developing countries seeking to move up the value chain.

However, the global environment for trade and investment has grown increasingly uncertain. Protectionism and geopolitical divisions risk reversing decades of progress. Global trade volumes declined by 0.1 percent last year, while global FDI fell by nearly 12 percent amid tighter financing conditions and rising risk perceptions.

To restore confidence, we must reinforce openness, transparency, and a rules-based multilateral trading system. A fully functioning WTO remains essential. We must remind ourselves that open markets and fair investment rules are not ends in themselves, but the most practical path to inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

Sustaining growth today also means adapting to profound transitions — digital, demographic, and energy — that are reshaping economies and societies. As this year's APEC Chair, Korea has advanced a cooperative approach to these transformations to ensure that no economy is left behind.

To make the benefits of these transitions accessible to all, Korea has introduced the APEC AI Initiative, the first leader-level text on AI within APEC. This initiative focuses on fostering innovation, building capacity, and promoting investment in energy- and resource-efficient infrastructure. We are committed to ensuring every economy's meaningful participation in the AI transformation so that technological progress benefits everyone.

Demographic change — from aging populations to youth unemployment and gender gaps — calls for new models of growth. Korea's APEC agenda emphasizes social resilience through investment in human capital, women's economic participation, and expanded care and education systems that sustain productivity.

In fact, these changes are interlinked. To fully capture the opportunities and mitigate the challenges of demographic transition, the effective and inclusive use of AI will be indispensable — a shared task for governments, industries, and international partners.

At the same time, sustainable transition lies at the heart of social resilience and supports digital transformation. At the 78th UN General Assembly last September, President Lee, Jae-myung reaffirmed Korea's commitment to expanding renewable energy and improving energy efficiency — aligning growth with sustainability.

Responding effectively to this transformation also requires strong national capacity and resilience in developing countries. Korea believes that effective development cooperation — grounded in country ownership, a focus on results, inclusive partnerships, transparency, and mutual accountability — offers the most practical path toward this goal.

Last September, we hosted the 8th Busan Global Partnership Forum, where governments, international organizations, and civil society turned these principles into concrete action. The discussions reaffirmed that effectiveness is not an abstract concept, but a proven approach that links resources to results and strengthens mutual trust.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNCTAD's universal membership and deep expertise make it uniquely positioned to connect growth drivers with resilience for this transition. Its work on trade, investment, technology, and capacity building can help developing countries seize opportunities and manage risks in this transformative era.

By linking its analytical strengths with a global effectiveness agenda, UNCTAD can ensure that cooperation is not only broader in scale, but also deeper in impact.

Korea's own experience of economic growth reflects the mission UNCTAD has championed for six decades. Guided by that experience, Korea continues to serve as a bridge between developed and developing partners — helping translate shared goals into tangible progress for all.

As we gather here at UNCTAD 16, I look forward to a fruitful discussion that will chart the course for UNCTAD's work over the next four years. Korea will remain a close and committed partner in this shared journey.

Thank you.