



Ministerial round table

21 October 2025
Assembly Hall
4.30–6 p.m.



Regionalism in a time of uncertainty

Description

Multilateral negotiations face increasing fragmentation driven by geopolitical tensions and the rise of unilateral trade-restrictive measures. In this challenging environment, regional and megaregional initiatives offer a pragmatic and flexible alternative, particularly for countries seeking to maintain momentum on trade liberalization and economic cooperation. Originally conceived as complementary to multilateralism, regional trade agreements provide dynamic platforms for cooperation among geographically and economically like-minded countries. They can contribute to expanding markets, attracting investment, creating jobs and fostering inclusive development. The long-standing support of UNCTAD for regional integration, including through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Global System of Trade Preferences, continues to be instrumental in advancing on this path.

Discussions at this round table will explore how open regionalism can respond to the present trade challenges through offering the predictability and certainty needed for sustainable economic growth. To guide the future work of UNCTAD on harnessing regionalism for development, discussions will draw on diverse regional experiences, distil key lessons learned and examine how integration efforts can respond to emerging priorities such as the digital economy and environmental sustainability, while complementing and reinforcing multilateral initiatives.

Programme

Opening remarks: Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD

Panel 1, with participation of ministers and heads of international organizations

Regionalism as a response to trade policy uncertainty

Questions

- How can open regionalism provide the predictability and certainty that trade and investment require in the current global context of increasing unilateralism and stalled multilateral negotiations?
- Which lessons can be drawn from existing regional and megaregional trade agreements in promoting inclusive and sustainable development, particularly for developing economies, and how can such agreements be made more effective towards achieving this objective?

Panel 2, with participation of ministers and heads of international organizations

Regional integration as a building block for multilateralism

Questions

- How can regionalism complement multilateralism and how can developing countries use regional platforms to influence global trade norms more effectively?
- Which key elements should modern regional trade agreements include to ensure that they are effective tools for economic integration, resilience and inclusive growth? What role can UNCTAD play in helping developing countries devise regional trade agreement models in support of development?

Moderator: To be determined

Format: Davos-style

Interpretation

Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian

Contact

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