

Report of H.E. Mr. A.L.A. Azeez
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka and Chairman of the
Trade and Development Commission at its 10th session
to the 67th Executive Session of the Trade and Development Board
Geneva, 5 February 2019, room XVII

Mr. President

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to report on the work of the Trade and Development Commission at its tenth session, which took place from 12 to 15 November 2018. The Commission session provided an opportunity for member States and other stakeholders to discuss key issues related to trade, multilateral cooperation and sustainable development. As per practice, the first three days of the Commission focused on the substantive items of the agenda. Informal consultations led to the adoption of its agreed conclusions. The Commission successfully completed the task assigned to it and it is with pleasure that I present to the Board the report of the Trade and Development Commission on its tenth session, as contained in the document TD/B/C.I/46.

During the opening plenary, the Chief of Staff, ad interim, of UNCTAD delivered a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD. He noted that even as global prospects appeared uncertain, UNCTAD would continue to assist countries in trade for development towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Patterns of global production networks had begun to shift, due to technological changes and declining returns on foreign direct investment, while increasing trade tensions affected many developing countries. A backlash against global trade, and equity concerns had added momentum to critics of trade integration and globalization. Addressing those concerns required taking steps at the national and international levels, including reenergizing existing regional trade agreements and supporting emerging ones, with a greater emphasis on complementary policies.

During subsequent discussions, the representatives of regional groups and many delegates underscored UNCTAD tools, publications and technical assistance in relation to trade facilitation and transport and requested continued support in monitoring, research and analysis, advisory services and provision of statistics on trade costs, including transport costs. They highlighted UNCTAD work on empowerment of national trade facilitation committees and building sustainable freight transport and corridor management. They also emphasized the importance of discussing trade, multilateral cooperation and sustainable development in the current global context and raised the concern that achievement of trade-related goals was far from fulfilled. Structural and external elements also needed to be addressed. Developing countries and the least developed countries were also confronted with higher trade and transport costs than developed countries.

Under agenda item 3, the Commission took note of the reports of the seventeenth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy and the third session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, and endorsed the agreed conclusions as contained therein. It also took note of the reports of the following expert meetings:

- Multi-year Expert Meeting on Commodities and Development, tenth session
- Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development, sixth session
- Multi-year Expert Meeting on Enhancing the Enabling Economic Environment at All Levels in Support of Inclusive and Sustainable Development, and the Promotion of Economic Integration and Cooperation, second session

Under agenda item 4, sessions were organized to address issues related to trade, multilateralism and sustainable development. The session on multilateralism under threat focused on four main issues: practical ways to strengthen the multilateral trading system; WTO reform; the development dimension; and the role of UNCTAD. Several Ambassadors and one Deputy Permanent Representative came to present their views on WTO reform during subsequent discussions, highlighting that reform of the multilateral trading system was necessary for poverty reduction as well as realizing economic opportunities.

During discussions on Trade Facilitation Partnerships and Reforms, the Commission was informed about the latest developments in the ratification and implementation of the TFA. Subsequently, panellists presented national and regional experiences, including updates on national and regional implementation of the TFA and the role of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs). Panellists highlighted the need to go beyond the TFA, the role of partnerships at the national and international level, and the contribution of trade and transport facilitation reforms to achieve the SDGs. Concretely, the presentations linked NTFCs to work on customs reform, trade and transport costs, seaports, transit and ASYCUDA, and regional trade facilitation coordination, maritime connectivity, and sustainable and resilient transport.

A session relating to regional trade agreements (RTAs) highlighted the contribution that South-South trade could make to the SDGs and discussed ways to include provisions in new-generation RTAs that addressed human well-being, the environment, and the SDGs. Participants noted that RTAs should complement, and not substitute multilateralism. During the ensuing discussion on trade in an unequal world, panellists highlighted that the desired effects of trade on prosperity had not manifested themselves across the board, and that the middle class in developed countries as well as the very poor in developing countries had been left out of the gains from trade. They called for more inclusiveness in trade agreement negotiations.

Under agenda item 5, the Commission provided the UNCTAD secretariat the opportunity to present progress reports on promoting and strengthening synergies among the three pillars. During these presentations, delegates stressed the importance of UNCTAD's work on blue economy, commodities (Gum Arabic), AfCFTA, non-tariff measures (NTMs), accession to WTO, services, south-south cooperation, creative economy, ASYCUDA, trade facilitation, and transport networks, among other topics. The UNCTAD Secretariat highlighted the need to expand capacity building programmes, deepen policy research, focus on the digitalization of trade logistics and strengthen partnerships. Further, the UNCTAD secretariat expressed appreciation for the support of delegates and proposed follow up meetings with various delegations in the coming months to address their priorities and areas of focus.

The Agreed Conclusions of the Commission commended the in-depth policy research and analysis conducted by the UNCTAD secretariat on trade and sustainable development and its innovative work on emerging issues, as well as the technical support given to the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The Commission requested UNCTAD to provide an open space for dialogue on the development dimension of the multilateral trading system, and to continue to monitor and report on trade trends and trade policy to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In concluding my report on the work of the tenth session of the Trade and Development Commission, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to all member States that contributed immensely to the success of this meeting.

Mr. President, may I commend to the Board the report of the Trade and Development Commission and the outcomes of its tenth session for necessary action.

Thank you, Mr. President.