



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General
21 May 2025

Original: English

Trade and Development Board
Trade and Development Commission
Fifteenth session
Geneva, 28–30 April 2025

Report of the Trade and Development Commission on its fifteenth session

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 28 to 30 April 2025



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	3
I. Action by the Trade and Development Commission.....	3
A. Leveraging international trade rules for development	3
B. Other action taken by the Commission	3
II. Chair's summary	5
A. Opening plenary meeting	5
B. Leveraging international trade rules for development	7
III. Organizational matters	9
A. Opening of the session.....	9
B. Election of officers	9
C. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.....	9
D. Other business.....	10
E. Adoption of the report of the Commission to the Trade and Development Board	10
 Annex	
Attendance.....	11

Introduction

The fifteenth session of the Trade and Development Commission was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 28 to 30 April 2025.

I. Action by the Trade and Development Commission

A. Leveraging international trade rules for development

Agreed conclusions

The Trade and Development Commission,

1. *Acknowledges* that trade can be a powerful engine for supporting inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction, and can be leveraged by developing countries to support the Sustainable Development Goals;

2. *Recognizes* the emergence of new issues, such as climate change, critical energy transition minerals, biodiversity degradation and rapid technological transformations, which all present opportunities as well as challenges for developing countries pursuing their structural transformation;

3. *Stresses* the importance of a rules-based, non-discriminatory, open, fair, inclusive, equitable and transparent multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core; and underscores the urgent need for this system to continue supporting those countries least integrated into the global trading system and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

4. *Emphasizes* that it is crucial to ensure that international trade benefits all, in particular microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises, women, youth, persons with disabilities and persons living in extreme poverty; and reiterates the centrality of the development dimension in the World Trade Organization;

5. *Reaffirms* that the provisions of special and differential treatment for developing countries and the least developed countries are an integral part of the World Trade Organization and its agreements; and notes that provisions for special and differential treatment should be precise, effective and operational;

6. *Notes* that regional integration and preferential trade agreements, including South–South and triangular cooperation and trade initiatives, can accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, promote economic diversification and build productive capacities;

7. *Calls for* UNCTAD to continue providing evidence-based research and analysis, as well as fostering consensus-building work and technical cooperation, to strengthen the capacity and expertise of developing countries, to better integrate them into and benefit from the global economy, thereby promoting sustainable development.

*Closing plenary meeting
30 April 2025*

B. Other action taken by the Commission

1. Reports of expert meetings (Agenda item 3)

1. At its opening plenary meeting, on 28 April 2025, the Trade and Development Commission considered agenda item 3.

(a) *Multi-year Expert Meeting on Commodities and Development*

2. On behalf of the Chair of the fifteenth session of the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Commodities and Development, the UNCTAD secretariat presented the report.

3. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/MEM.2/63.

4. One regional group stressed that commodity dependence was the highest priority, with 85 per cent of the least developed countries reliant on two or three commodities; emphasized the need to establish an intergovernmental group of experts on commodities and development, to support sustainable growth and economic diversification; and noted the importance of industrial policies and development strategies and of managing the increasing demand for critical energy transition minerals.

(b) *Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development*

5. The Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur of the eleventh session of the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development presented the report.

6. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/MEM.4/33.

(c) *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*

7. The Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur of the seventh session of the 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, presented the report.

8. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/MEM.8/20.

9. One regional group and one delegate expressed support for the multi-year expert meetings and for the continued work of UNCTAD on devising development strategies. One delegate highlighted the focus in the Caribbean on value added manufacturing and the processing of raw materials, to better enable engagement in supply and value chains and to mitigate the impacts of global price fluctuations and economic shocks. Efforts had been undertaken in services sectors, but further capacity-building was required in this regard, including from UNCTAD. In addition, the sharing of national experiences, the attraction of investment and financing for development and the enhancement of transport, trade logistics and trade facilitation were critical.

(d) *Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation*

10. The Chair of the eleventh session of the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation presented the report.

11. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/MEM.7/33.

2. Report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy
(Agenda item 4)

12. On behalf of the Chair of the twenty-second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy, the UNCTAD secretariat presented the report.

13. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/CLP/77, and endorsed the agreed conclusions as contained therein.

3. Report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy

(Agenda item 5)

14. On behalf of the Chair of the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, the UNCTAD secretariat presented the report.

15. The Commission took note of the report, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/CPLP/42, and endorsed the agreed conclusions as contained therein.

16. One regional group and a few delegates expressed appreciation for the work on competition and consumer protection, recognizing the essential contributions to market functioning, sustainable economic growth and international cooperation. They noted that sessions of the Intergovernmental Groups of Experts should continue to be held, that mandates for the informal working groups should be maintained and that UNCTAD work on the digital economy and major technology companies should be advanced. In addition, they emphasized the importance of capacity-building and technical cooperation in competition and consumer protection among developing countries; and the role of competition policy in fostering innovation, growth, sustainable consumption and collaboration, particularly in the context of digitalization.

II. Chair's summary

A. Opening plenary meeting

1. Opening statements

17. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD stated that the focus of the present session on leveraging international trade rules for development was timely since, in the past three months, the global trade scene had witnessed radical changes and the multilateral trading system, embodied by the World Trade Organization, was being challenged at its core. Recently announced tariff increases breached the most-favoured nation principle, whereby a tariff concession obtained by any World Trade Organization member was automatically extended to all other members, and did not take into account the development status of countries. The impacts on vulnerable and small economies would be detrimental and, further, the rapidly fluctuating trade environment undermined the predictability that nurtured a business environment favourable to investment and innovation.

18. The Deputy Secretary-General noted that, over the past three decades, the multilateral trading system had offered a clear and transparent set of rules, limiting arbitrary decisions in trade, and that such rules had been particularly important for smaller economies, such as small island developing States and the least developed countries, as were the significant market access concessions, including special and differential treatment. Further, the Agreement on Trade Facilitation linked the implementation of a global set of minimum rules for cross-border trade procedures to the provision of technical assistance to developing countries. However, the Deputy Secretary-General stressed that World Trade Organization trade rules also remained unbalanced with regard to the needs of developing countries and that most developing countries had not been able to use the World Trade Organization framework to significantly diversify their economies. Levels of commodity dependence had not declined and the share of the least developed countries in global exports had not changed significantly. In addition, non-tariff measures disproportionately affected developing countries and the lack of progress in negotiations in areas essential to developing countries, such as agriculture, electronic commerce and fishery subsidies, remained a source of concern.

19. Finally, the Deputy Secretary-General stated that dialogue was increasingly important in order to forge fairer trade rules, which should not only address some of the deep imbalances that had led to the current crisis, but also strengthen the development dimension of the multilateral trading system and address the sustainability of trade, climate

change and the digital revolution, to begin exploring how to build a future-proof trading system. Further, regional integration and South–South cooperation offered potential trade gains for developing countries and the United Nations offered mechanisms for multilateral dialogue on trade-related issues, such as through the Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals of the United Nations Secretary-General, co-led by UNCTAD. UNCTAD would continue to support efforts to steer the future of the world trading system, working together towards a multilateral trading system that boosted development.

20. The following delegations made opening statements: the representative of Peru, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; the representative of the European Union, on behalf of the European Union and its member States; the representative of Nepal, on behalf of the least developed countries; the representative of Malaysia, on behalf of the Asia–Pacific Group; the representative of Guatemala on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries; the representative of Egypt, on behalf of the African Group; the representative of the Dominican Republic, on behalf of small island developing States; the representative of Jamaica, on behalf of countries of the Caribbean Community; the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the representative of Barbados; the representative of the Russian Federation; the representative of Brazil; the representative of Indonesia; the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the representative of Lebanon; and the representative of Cabo Verde.

21. One regional group and several delegates stated that the focus of the present session on leveraging international trade rules for development was timely. Several regional groups and several delegates stressed that the global economy was increasingly fragmented, characterized by increasing protectionism, heightened geopolitical tensions and climate-related and technological disruptions, and that a rules-based, non-discriminatory, inclusive, transparent, equitable and development-oriented multilateral trading system was vital in ensuring stability, fairness and international cooperation and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A few regional groups and one delegate noted, however, that, in many developing countries, integration into global trade remained hindered by structural challenges, including with regard to commodity dependence, limited productive capacities and persistent barriers to value addition. A few regional groups and one delegate stated that the multilateral trading system served as a tool with which to foster inclusive economic growth and support development trajectories. One regional group and one delegate underscored the need to build productive capacities.

22. A few regional groups and a few delegates noted that a fair multilateral trading system based on universal rules ensured trade growth and the promotion of sustainable development, particularly for developing countries and the least developed countries. A few delegates emphasized the importance of supporting South–South cooperation. One delegate noted the need to better equip developing countries to integrate into and move up global value chains. Another delegate stressed the need to raise awareness of and seek solutions to issues of importance for small island developing States. A few regional groups and a few delegates highlighted the need for a tailored approach to special and differential treatment provisions, which needed to be strengthened and more needs based.

23. Several regional groups and some delegates stated that, in the lead up to the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XVI), there was a need to reaffirm the commitment to a fair multilateral trading system, recognizing the needs of developing countries, including landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and the least developed countries. A few regional groups and several delegates highlighted that the work of UNCTAD under its three pillars was essential, including to enable progress toward fairer, people-centred trade policies and to enable developing countries to fully integrate into the global economy, harness the benefits of trade and formulate effective, development-oriented strategies aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. One regional group emphasized the need to reinforce the role of UNCTAD in shaping a fairer, more inclusive global trading system that enabled all countries to grow, innovate and thrive in ways that reflected national priorities and development objectives. A few delegates noted the need for closer coordination between UNCTAD and other international organizations. One regional group highlighted UNCTAD support in advancing digital government tools for investment facilitation and support to the

least developed countries in Africa and to small and medium-sized enterprises. Another regional group stated that, since structural challenges affected not only trade in goods, but also trade in services, UNCTAD could study how the latter responded to current trade restrictions. In support of an earlier call made by one regional group, one delegate noted the need to establish an intergovernmental group of experts on commodities and development.

24. One delegate highlighted the importance of critical energy transition minerals and the need for the equitable participation of developing countries in value chains, and noted that unilateral coercive measures had a long-term negative macroeconomic effect, undermining confidence in those who imposed them; there was a need to analyse the challenges to the multilateral trading system, intensify work on the global system of trade preferences among developing countries and promote the modernization of non-reciprocal preferences, to create a fairer environment for trade and development. Another delegate, noting that unilateral coercive measures had led to losses in strategic sectors, stressed the need for a working group on assessing the impacts of unilateral coercive measures on global trade and sustainable development.

25. In exercising the right of reply, the representative of one regional group said that the sanctions applied by his region complied with international law; sanctions were always targeted, affecting those who breached the law rather than civilian populations. In addition, policies to address climate change were carried out in a consultative and transparent manner, accompanied by support and cooperation activities, with many developing countries.

2. Progress report on promoting and strengthening synergies among the three pillars (Agenda item 7)

26. The UNCTAD secretariat presented the work of the Division on International Trade and Commodities under the three pillars of work of research and analysis, consensus-building and technical cooperation.

27. One regional group expressed appreciation for support received during preparations for UNCTAD XVI and stated that UNCTAD research could offer suggestions on funding measures for nationally determined contributions of the least developed countries and that UNCTAD should continue to provide assistance to the least developed countries on data collection.

B. Leveraging international trade rules for development (Agenda item 6)

28. The multi-year expert meeting held one panel discussion under the agenda item.

29. The UNCTAD secretariat introduced the topic, as contained in document TD/B/C.I/60.

30. A five-member panel led the discussion. The panel was comprised of the following: Dean, Paris School of International Affairs, Paris Institute of Political Studies; Professor of Geopolitics and Strategy, International Institute for Management Development, Lausanne, Switzerland; Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations Office at Geneva; Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva; and Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

31. The first panellist highlighted that member States shared the goal of fostering quality growth and jobs through trade and investment, but faced challenges related to technological shifts, decarbonization and geopolitical tensions. She outlined the following three key lessons: unilateral trade actions were inefficient; vulnerable countries needed to be protected from trade disruptions; and trade and finance needed to be more closely integrated. Finally, the panellist emphasized the need for renewed cooperation, trade system reform and stronger domestic policies, to ensure inclusive and resilient economic development.

32. The second panellist reiterated the need for World Trade Organization reform and emphasized the importance of data-driven, precedent-informed responses to current concerns, particularly with regard to the increase of unilateral trade measures. He analysed case studies, demonstrating the varying impact of lost United States of America market access and stating that open global markets, export reorientation and exporter competitiveness were key in ensuring continued progress. Finally, with regard to trade deflection, the panellist stressed the need for proportionate, informed responses; diversified export strategies; and stronger domestic supply-side policies.

33. The third panellist stated that the World Trade Organization remained vital but needed reforms related to rules, trust-building and decision-making. He emphasized that special and differential treatment needed to be preserved and used strategically, to reflect real economic disparities, and that developing countries needed to be empowered to benefit from global trade in sectors such as clean technology, health and sustainable products, including through better access to trade-related support, finance and capacity-building, such as through the reinvigoration of the Aid for Trade initiative and reforms of official development assistance models. Finally, the panellist stressed the need for UNCTAD support through an assessment of how developing countries had used previously outlined World Trade Organization flexibilities.

34. The fourth panellist stressed the need to modernize special and differential treatment provisions and underscored the importance of maintaining foundational World Trade Organization principles, such as predictability, non-discrimination and transparency, amid reform discussions, for effective development policy. He highlighted that, at the World Trade Organization, Egypt had noted the linkage of trade rules with the Sustainable Development Goals, and noted the need for the greater awareness and use of related resources.

35. The fifth panellist highlighted how trade, particularly under the World Trade Organization framework, had supported economic development in Zambia. She stated that Zambia had leveraged the Agreement on Trade Facilitation as part of improving border processes, customs efficiency and regional trade cooperation. Key achievements included establishing a national trade facilitation committee, adopting the Automated System for Customs Data World system of UNCTAD, launching a trade information portal, implementing one-stop border posts and reducing border clearance times. The panellist stressed, however, that challenges remained, such as with regard to financial constraints, limited awareness and coordination issues at borders.

36. In the ensuing discussion, one delegate expressed support for UNCTAD as a forum at which to discuss both finance and trade, particularly for non-World Trade Organization members. In response to a query from one delegate on negotiation tactics, one panellist cautioned against closing markets and another panellist noted the need to establish clear negotiation objectives and redlines, citing export redirection strategies as alternatives to bilateral trade agreements. One regional group expressed caution concerning the effectiveness of export redirection, noting the possibility of overall downturn and contagion from sovereign measures. In response to a query from one delegate on making trade more inclusive and sustainable, one panellist detailed the need for strong domestic policies, to manage unequal impacts. Some delegates highlighted the need for new multilaterally agreed solutions, to address emerging global challenges, particularly climate change, environmental sustainability and the transition to clean energy and a digital economy, while noting that trade rules in these areas needed to be formulated within the multilateral trading system and include developing countries.

37. Several delegates emphasized the critical role of trade in driving economic growth and reducing poverty; outlined the importance of a multilateral trading system that was, *inter alia*, rules-based, non-discriminatory, open, fair, inclusive and transparent; and, in this context, emphasized the need for practical reforms of the World Trade Organization and the multilateral trading system, making reference to the preservation and strengthening of special and differential treatment provisions, the re-establishment of a dispute settlement mechanism, technology transfer and agriculture. In addition, several delegates highlighted the significant challenges faced in developing countries, in particular small island developing States and the least developed countries, in fully participating in the global

trading system, including with regard to systemic issues such as limited industrial capacity, commodity dependence and financing-related and technological gaps. Further, several delegates underscored the critical role of UNCTAD in supporting developing countries under its three pillars of work.

38. Some delegates detailed how recent unilateral measures had fuelled trade tensions, undermined global economic stability and disproportionately impacted developing countries, and expressed concern with regard to long-term harm to the multilateral system and global development efforts. A few regional groups and one delegate emphasized the importance of continuing and strengthening technical assistance, including in areas such as trade facilitation, non-tariff measures, digitalization and leveraging regional and multilateral trade agreements. One regional group and a few delegates stressed the need for enhanced support, to improve the capacity of developing countries to participate effectively in World Trade Organization negotiations and to benefit from international trade. A few delegates urged UNCTAD to take a more active role in shaping reforms of the multilateral trade system, ensuring that the voices and priorities of developing and vulnerable countries were fully reflected, and a few other delegates reaffirmed the mandate and convening power of UNCTAD in this regard as indispensable in such efforts.

III. Organizational matters

A. Opening of the session

39. The fifteenth session of the Trade and Development Commission was opened at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 28 April 2025, by Mr. Muhammadou MO Kah (Gambia), Chair of the Commission at its fourteenth session.

B. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

40. At its opening plenary meeting, on 28 April 2025, the Commission elected the following officers to serve on its Bureau:

Chair: Mr. Alireza Jeyrani Hokmabad (Islamic Republic of Iran)

Rapporteur: Mr. Andrei Rusu (Romania)

Vice-Chairs: Mr. Thulfiqar Ali Bader Altemimy (Iraq)

Ms. Ana Libertad Guzmán Villeda (Guatemala)

41. The Chair of the Commission informed delegates that Group B did not have nominations for the two positions of Vice-Chair and that Group C did not have a nomination for the position of Vice-Chair.

C. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

42. At its opening plenary meeting, the Commission adopted its provisional agenda as contained in document TD/B/C.I/59. The agenda was thus as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Reports of expert meetings:
 - (a) Multi-year Expert Meeting on Commodities and Development;
 - (b) Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development;
 - (c) 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;

- (d) Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation.
- 4. Report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy.
- 5. Report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy.
- 6. Leveraging international trade rules for development.
- 7. Progress report on promoting and strengthening synergies among the three pillars.
- 8. Other business.
- 9. Adoption of the report of the Commission to the Trade and Development Board.

D. Other business

(Agenda item 8)

- 43. There were no other pending issues before the Commission.

E. Adoption of the report of the Commission to the Trade and Development Board

(Agenda item 9)

- 44. At its closing plenary meeting, on 30 April 2025, the Trade and Development Commission authorized the Rapporteur, under the authority of the Chair, to finalize the report after the conclusion of the meeting. The report would be submitted to the Trade and Development Board.

Annex

Attendance*

1. Representatives from the following States members of the Conference attended the session:

Angola	Malaysia
Bhutan	Morocco
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mozambique
Brazil	Namibia
Cabo Verde	Nauru
Chile	Niger
China	Oman
Congo	Pakistan
Côte d'Ivoire	Paraguay
Dominican Republic	Republic of Korea
Egypt	Romania
Estonia	Russian Federation
Ethiopia	Samoa
Gabon	Spain
Guatemala	State of Palestine
Guinea	Thailand
Guyana	Togo
Haiti	Trinidad and Tobago
Holy See	Turkmenistan
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Türkiye
Iraq	Uruguay
Jamaica	United Republic of Tanzania
Japan	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Lebanon	Viet Nam
Lesotho	Zambia
Libya	Zimbabwe
Lithuania	

2. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the session:
European Union
3. The following specialized agencies and related organizations were represented at the session:
Universal Postal Union
4. The following non-governmental organizations were represented at the session:
General category
International Network for Standardization of Higher Education Degrees

* This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/C.I/INF.15.