

Civil Society Groups in UNCTAD XIII Call for a Paradigm Shift to address Multiple Crises with a strengthened UNCTAD at the Forefront

As UNCTAD XIII begins, civil society groups called on UNCTAD and its member states to pursue a fundamental shift in economic and development paradigms and bring about major systemic reforms in light of global multiple crises. They urged UNCTAD to be at the forefront of this process.

At the UNCTAD XIII Opening Plenary, Ziad Abdel Samad of the Arab NGO Network on Development, speaking in behalf of civil society, emphasized the challenges the Conference must address. *“The world is witnessing a multidimensional crisis - the food crisis, the climate crisis, and the economic and financial crisis - in addition to the enormous and rapidly worsening inequalities between rich and poor,”* he stated. *“The continuation of this situation without proper solutions and interventions was the main reason of the wave of the popular and democratic movements across the world, and in particular in this region, since the beginning of 2011,”* he added.

Abdel Samad gave the highlights of the Civil Society Declaration to UNCTAD XIII issued by a wide range of civil society after a consultative and consensus-building process that culminated on April 19 at the Civil Society Forum in Doha. As part of a “major paradigm shift based on holistic visions and new measures of progress,” the Declaration outlines vital steps that governments around the world and UNCTAD itself must undertake in response to the multiple crises.

Among these is the call for UNCTAD to be at the forefront of “a thorough and critical review of trade and development policies and agreements and the development of analyses and proposals for alternative options and appropriate development strategies for developing countries.” Urging the reversal of “negative effects of years of economic orthodoxy and neoliberal policy,” the Declaration also demanded the rethinking of macro-economic policy, re-regulation of the financial sector, more progressive and effective global and domestic taxes, redefining development cooperation, more sustainable production systems and technology, transformative social protection, and making human rights central to policy formulation, including the right to development, rights of workers, small farmers and producers, women and consumers.

Civil society groups also urged UNCTAD to “assume a bigger role in global economic governance and contribute to the transformation of global economic governance institutions.”

At a press conference held earlier in the day, civil society leaders warned of dynamics underway at UNCTAD XIII, Gyekye Tanoh of the African Trade Network and Third World Network Africa said that civil society is gravely concerned about developed countries’ attempts to silence UNCTAD’s vital work on finance and

macroeconomic issues in relation to trade and development. *“This could well escalate into a full blown crisis of development as an added catastrophic dimension of the still unabated global financial turmoil”* he said.

Tanoh added that these attempts are coming from leading global political and economic powers and developed countries who are proving to be *“the most obdurate and hostile in preventing an honest accounting of what lies at the root of the situation wherein financial markets and institutions have become the masters rather than the servants of the real economy, distorting trade and investment, heightening levels of inequality, and posing a systemic threat to economic stability.* The Euro zone crisis, currently the eye-of-the-storm, daily reveals the toll and destructiveness of the insatiable dictatorship of finance over peoples and economies already witnessed across the Atlantic.”

In order to protect UNCTAD from assaults in the current negotiations to prevent it from continuing its vital work in providing alternative analysis and policy recommendations on how to address multiple crises and shift to more people-centred economic policies, civil society groups have urged governments to “reaffirm” the Accra Accord, the agreement reached four years ago at UNCTAD XII. This would enable UNCTAD to carry out its work in the full range of issues for which it already has a mandate, and to further expand implementation of this mandate into new areas that are required by the global situation.

Tanoh also highlighted that these are the same governments who have failed to deliver on their international legally binding commitments to address the climate crisis. *“ In Africa and Asia, grim economic survival now merges with dismal ecological existence as the early effects of major climate warming wreak disaster and portend doom for hundreds of millions in the here and now”* he said. *“But those who would throw trillions to bulge their banks balances cannot bother with carrying out their basic obligations, those known measures that will cool down and reverse the climate change bubbling towards catastrophe,”* he further added.

For civil societies, a crucial part of the agenda of UNCTAD XIII is whether or not UNCTAD will be hamstrung from dissecting and flagging problems and solutions to the fact to the multiple crises that people everywhere have paid and will continue to pay.