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Impacts of trade tariffs on the realization of the right to development

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Transcript of statement by H.E. Ms. Nahida Sobhan,
Permanent Representative of Bangladesh

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Expert Mechanism,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I see a lot of synergies. So, what my colleague, Ambassador of Lesotho has just said, I will probably echo a lot of what he has said, because when you have facts, it is same for everybody, no matter who speaks about it. When you're talking about the reality and the facts. So, I will probably echo a lot of my distinguished colleague has just said.

Bangladesh thanks the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development for convening this timely discussion on the impact of trade tariffs on the realization of the right to development. We often forget that the measures that we take in the global trade regime affects human rights in a lot of way, and particularly the right to development. So, bringing this on the table, I think it's just awakening us about how it is affecting the right to development. And that's why it is very timely to discuss this today. We also appreciate the concept note and the valuable analysis by UN entities, including UNCTAD, which together offer a critical foundation for this dialogue that we are having today.

Mr. Chair,

The 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development, guarantees every human person and all peoples the right to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development. However, this right cannot be realized in an international order that tolerates structural inequalities and discriminatory economic policies. Trade, if governed fairly, is a vital enabler of development that ensures the right to contribute and enjoy economic development for all, meaning the right to development. But if distorted through different unilateral measures, it becomes a barrier that entrenches inequality.

Recent global trade trends expose a deeply concerning shift away from multilateralism. The escalation of tariffs has disproportionately affected developing economies, especially least developed countries. Such tariff measures undermine market taxes, disrupt production networks, raise export costs, and create uncertainty in global supply chains.

Mr. Chair,

According to UNCTAD's tariff report, tariffs imposed on LDC exports to major global markets have tripled in recent months, and these countries now face tariffs twice as high as those imposed on exports from developed economies. This is not only an issue of trade discrimination. It raises serious questions of development, justice and equity in the global economic system.

Over 11 million workers in LDCs are employed in tariff affected export sectors, particularly in textiles and light manufacturing, and more than half of them are women. In Bangladesh, our ready-made garment sector has been central to poverty reduction and women's economic empowerment, allowing them the right to participate in economic activities and development aspirations in Bangladesh. But the current scenario is set to affect this scenario very negatively.

Mr. Chair,

For graduating LDCs like Bangladesh, the situation is even more precarious. Bangladesh is aspiring to graduate from the LDC category in 2026. However, LDC graduation must not become a trap. And I am afraid that the geo-economic fragmentation can contribute in backtracking our aspirations. The sudden loss of preferential market access and exposure to higher most favoured nation tariffs could erode export competitiveness, narrow industrial development space, and reverse hard earned development gains. UNCTAD warns that some graduating LDCs may face tariff increases of up to 20% percentage points in their leading export sectors.

To ensure a smooth transition, Bangladesh emphasizes that LDC graduation must be smooth, sustainable, and irreversible, as mandated by UNGA resolutions. To sustain development momentum. We call for fairness in global trade governance and adequate international support measures during and after graduation. And this part and this aspiration of our graduation and the situation is LDCs hamper in a lot of ways. My colleague the Ambassador just mentioned, which infringes the right to development of every single person.

Mr. Chair,

Bangladesh believes that the current trade environment must be addressed through collective action and policy clearance under a rules-based multilateral framework. In this regard, allow me to highlight 4 key priorities, and I will be highlighting a lot on the trade regime and how institutions like WTO can help and look into taking in actions that will ensure and guarantee the right to development through a rules-based trading system that needs to exist in the global scenario internationally.

First, we call for the preservation and strengthening of special and differential treatment in the multilateral trading system … is not a concession or a charity. It is a treaty embedded right grounded in development equity. WTO reforms must reinforce, not dilute, the development dimension of trade rules that has a lot of connection to guaranteeing and to enjoyment of right to development.

Second, we propose an international support package for graduating LDCs for smooth transition, including an extension of duty-free quota, free market accesses for an adequate period of time, but no less than six years after graduation. This measure is crucial to prevent preference erosion and tariff shocks that undermine export industries and employment.

Third, Bangladesh stresses the urgent need to resist the fragmentation of the multilateral trading system. Meaningful progress now requires restoration of a fully functioning dispute settlement system that protects weaker economies and ensures fairness for all and thereby ensuring the right to development of all the stakeholders in the weaker economies.

Fourth, trade must be aligned with human rights and the right to development by exercising fair trade. Trade policy decision should be subject to development impact assessments, and no measure should impede the right of nations to develop equitably.

Mr. Chair,

Another emerging threat is the rise of non-tariff barriers disguised as environmental measures. Climate responsibility must be shared, not shifted. Without climate finance, technology transfer and capacity building, such measures run the risk of becoming new protectionism in green clothing. In parallel, South-South cooperation, regional value chains and trade diversification must be strengthened to reduce over dependence on volatile markets. Equally, aid for trade and trade finance must be significantly scaled up to build productive capacity and value addition in developing countries.

I would also like to underscore that trade must not become a tool that divides nations into winners and losers. Tariffs must not be utilized against the most vulnerable economies and the people who are most in marginalized situations. Development cannot be achieved in isolation. It demands solidarity, fairness and justice in the international economic system, and thereby also it needs to be seen that the right to development cannot be achieved without the international economic situation that works as an enabler. International trade must remain a driver of equality and shared prosperity, not a source of exclusion.

Thank you.

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