12th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, 27-29 October 2025

Item 5.b.(iii): Implementation of the mandate and programme of work
Focused thematic discussions and interactive dialogues
Impacts of trade tariffs on the realization of the right to development

Oral statement delivered by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

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Mr. Chair,

APG23 thanks the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development and Mr. Mihir Kanade for the theme chosen for this discussion. Indeed, it is a really crucial topic given the evolving landascapes of development and global trade regime, both affected by the increasing tendency to unilateralism and the erosion of spaces for cooperative, legitimate and rules-based multilateral frameworks.

One year ago, during an insightful panel discussion in the context of the 10th session of the Expert Mechanism, many of us shared our views on the impactful relation among trade and human rights, underlining the adverse effects of the unbalances of global trade regime on people, communities and the environment, despite of the aims assigned to trade by the Monterrey Consensus and the Marrakesh Agreement.

One year later, we are assisting to a further crumbling of international trade architecture and its mission of being an "engine for development", as stated in the Monterrey Consensus and the following Conferences on Financing for Development along the years. The escalating and differential tariffs have exacerbated an already unfair and unbalanced global trade governance which reflects neo-colonial and corporate-centric power relations and unilateral approaches. It was already undermining the achievement of an enabling environment for sustainable development and the same realisation of the right to development for all people and countries.

The widespread disruption and instability caused by the current trade tensions just amplify the inherent fragility and inequity of the multilateral trading system. Such an ongoing crisis in global trade reveals an urgent need for a renewed multilateral commitment to deeply revising and reforming its architecture and governance, by putting participation, accountability, ownership and equity principles at the core.

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) could have been be a prime opportunity for this deep transformation - but it did not happen. The most ambitious proposals, which could also contribute to reframe the transmission mechanisms of measures like the escalating and differential tariffs, have been drastically watered down during the negotiation rounds.

As said also by Prof. Kanade, reorienting global trading system and make it a positive engine for sustainable development requires adopting a right to development perspective in facing and reforming those issues with a principles-based approach.

Among the policy solutions coherent to such perspective and the principles of the right to development, we want to underline the need for reshaping trade rules - within WTO, multilateral trade agreements and multilateral frameworks such as FfD – with the aim to generate the necessary policy space for development, especially for developing countries. Providing adequate and enhanced trade policy space is a tool for equity, ensuring developing countries to pursue their chosen and nationally determined pathways of wellbeing and sustainability, protect domestic production, livelihoods and food security, and defending against unfair competition and corporate exploitation. Such a tool is essential to face and reverse the effects of discriminatory measures against developing countries such as Unilateral Trade Measures (UTMs), which threaten exports and local production and entire developing economies, or Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms, which erode participatory processes and leave developing economies vulnerable to undemocratic imposition and corporate abuses.

In this regard, another important step we would mention is the adoption of a legally binding instrument to regulate, in human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

Vulnerable communities and countries are struggling to keep on pursuing their development patterns despite facing the human, economic, social and environmental consequences of systemic crises induced by the global governance gaps and failures, of which the recent trade tensions and the escalating and differential tariffs that are being imposed, are mainly a consequence, not a cause. Overcoming those gaps and failures is only possible by restructuring global trading system within a right to development perspective, in order to make it the well-functioning engine for inclusive and sustainable development needed by vulnerable communities and countries.

We aspire to live in a world where human rights are protected within - and not from - global trade!

Thank You!