

Delegation from
The Student World Assembly (NGO)

Represented by
LaGuardia Community College

Position Paper for United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

The issues before the Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are: Promotion of Gender Equality in Development, Poverty Eradication, and Considering a Code of Conduct for TNCs. The Student World Assembly (SWA), a global student forum dedicated to education, participation and action toward a stable, democratic and secure world, fully supports UNCTAD and its endeavors in spearheading economic development and growth of less developed countries (LDCs). The SWA advocates for a democratic and socially responsible global community, the socio-economic needs of LDCs, fair trade to reduce poverty, elimination of sweatshops and responsible corporate behaviour. It therefore strongly supports the UN Global Compact and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I. Promotion of Gender Equality in Development

The SWA recognizes the importance of gender equality in development. It is deeply conscious of the inequalities that women face globally and affirms its support for the objectives of UNCTAD that seek to empower women and promote economic equality. The SWA organizational structure reflects its commitment to gender equality, and its activities seek to promote this further through equal access to educational resources and full democratic participation. While it applauds and fully supports the efforts in this area of NGOs, IGOs and member states, it agrees with the European Commission that strategies need to be more proactive than in the past.

The SWA, while respectful of cultural contexts, recognizes the prominent role of cultural and social traditions in reinforcing gender inequality. It draws attention to the importance of education as a primary tool for mitigating those norms that lead to gender disparity in developing countries. Being a body which embraces diversity, however, the SWA realizes that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for advancing the status of women in different regions. It therefore encourages UNCTAD programs which specifically target different women's needs, following examples like the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) who have successfully tailored gender equality efforts according to regional need.

The SWA believes that a sustainable domestic economy is important for empowering women's independence. It is concerned that much women's employment in developing countries is in the informal sector. While such employment can provide opportunities to lift women out of oppression and poverty, its commonly insecure nature and lack of regulation can also compound these problems. The SWA therefore supports efforts by governments and organizations to help grow infant industries in this sector to levels which can develop long-term planning and provide stable employment. It is particularly supportive of micro-credit strategies to achieve this.

The obvious incompatibilities between some trade/economic liberalisation policies and gender equality/promotion objectives for developing countries are of concern to the SWA. It calls upon the WTO, IMF and the World Bank to make and monitor clearer expectations of gender development in member states. The influence of these organizations in the global economic system obliges them to take more responsibility in this area.

II. Poverty Eradication

The SWA believes that poverty eradication is imperative for a stable, fair and fruitful world. All individuals, communities and nations should be able to participate fully and equally in the globalized economy, but this is impossible when there are major economic

disparities and poverty is so prevalent. The SWA recalls the MDG commitment to 'reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day (and those) who suffer from hunger', therefore fully supports efforts made by IGOs, NGOs and governments to achieve this. It is also keen to seek new ways of achieving global economic balance.

While the SWA acknowledges the importance of trade to development, it understands that poverty eradication is not possible if this factor alone is relied upon. It therefore applauds changes of emphases in UNCTAD strategies to put development before trade rather than trade before development. A humanization of the international trade system is required. Free trade policies can only be effective where economies are already developed and operating efficiently. The SWA calls upon the WTO to make more realistic provisions for developing countries to nurture their emerging industries and economies before exposing them to open international trade, and to alter intellectual property rules so that these countries can have access to technology important for industrial development.

The SWA recognizes that poverty has a multitude of sub-issues that can compound its negative effects for individuals, families, communities and nations. It is at the micro-level that the SWA believes long-lasting successful change should, where possible, begin. It therefore affirms its support of micro-credit strategies for grass-roots level development. Just as SWA believes global democracy can be achieved one student at a time, so could global poverty be relieved, at least, one person at a time.

The SWA also realizes, nevertheless, that poverty issues must be dealt with at both international and national level. A more coordinated approach to assistance and aid implementation between the many NGOs, IGOs, TNCs and member states is therefore desired by the SWA. Poverty eradication policies must not just be discussion pieces, but catalysts and programs for affirmative and successful action.

III. Considering a Code of Conduct for TNCs

While the SWA readily acknowledges the positive contributions that efficient and prosperous global markets can make to aiding development, it believes the benefits brought by TNCs must be weighed against their negative impacts. The SWA does not believe these should be tolerated as necessary side-effects of development, or constitute an excuse for non-regulation. As a promoter of global democracy, the SWA is deeply concerned about the lack of international labour standards, and asserts the importance of individual citizenship and human rights over corporate profits. It applauds advances in the development of the Global Compact, and fully supports UNCTAD strategies to reinforce its aims in the fields of human rights, labour standards and environmental responsibility.

The SWA recognizes that the pursuit of profit is the key goal of TNCs, therefore believes that moral objectives should be protected through formal regulation measures. It whole-heartedly supports the creation and implementation of a code of conduct for TNCs. Noting the earlier work of the UNCTC, the SWA recommends that UNCTAD revisits the work of this conference and adapts its original objectives to the development of a code relevant to today's economic environment. The SWA notes, however, that regulations will only be efficient so long as they can be implemented and supported by existing economic structures. It is therefore important that these be developed in coordination with international financial market and banking rules.

The SWA ultimately desires a universal code of conduct for TNCs, but recognizes the limitations of achieving this goal in the short term. It acknowledges the potential of international codes of conduct, particularly those of the OECD and ILO. The SWA therefore recommends that UNCTAD support coordination between such international organizations to standardize their codes of conduct for TNCs, so that a universal one be developed in the long term. Such initiatives are vital to the interests of people, cultures and ecological systems the world over.