

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

AID FOR TRADE

**Report on a Conference Organized by
UNCTAD and Commonwealth Secretariats**



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Executive Summary

A Conference on *Aid For Trade (AfT)* was organized by UNCTAD and the Commonwealth Secretariat between 21-22 March 2006. Conference participants discussed how the initiative could be used to address the key trade-related problems of developing countries, particularly LDCs, which hamper their effective participation in, and limit their benefits from, international trade, including those likely to arise from the outcome of the WTO Doha Trade Round. Such problems include the *lack of competitive supply capacity* to take advantage of the market access opportunities that would be offered in the Doha Round, underdeveloped or inadequate *infrastructure*, and the relatively high *adjustment and implementation* costs associated with trade reforms. The conference helped to clarify concepts, definitions, issues and perceptions concerning AfT. But one strong, key message emerging from the conference was that *aid for trade should ensure additional, adequate, secure, non-debt creating and predictable funding for deeper-end trade capacity development, and should be channeled through a process that is demand-driven and owned by developing countries*. Among possible delivery mechanisms to provide AfT funding, a suggestion was made by Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz for a stand-alone Global Trade Facility (GTF). Also while there was agreement in general that AfT funding should be predictable, participants discussed — but did not reach a consensus on — the modalities for ensuring such predictability, including the notion of making it binding and enforceable within the WTO.

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Summary report

A Conference on Aid for Trade organized by UNCTAD and the Commonwealth Secretariat in Geneva (21-22 March 2006) was the first international forum of its kind after the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in December 2005 to consider key conceptual, operational and implementation issues related to the Aid for Trade (AfT) initiative, and the contribution it could make to the development of developing countries. In sum, the conference contributed ideas on how a consensus could evolve towards achieving an effective AfT initiative that is development-oriented. It helped clarify issues relating to the architecture of the AfT, building on the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration (HKMD); reinforced the message that AfT must deliver development in developing countries; and discussed other strategic issues which need to be taken up in further deliberations. It set the basis for better informed deliberations and decision-making and policy on AfT in various fora, including the WTO Task Force on AfT, and within the United Nations system.

The conference was attended by UNCTAD member States, WTO trade negotiators, as well as officials from the WTO, World Bank, IMF, UNDP, OECD, regional development banks, regional integration secretariats of developing countries, other international organizations, private sector

representatives, NGOs, academics and the press. UNCTAD and the Commonwealth Secretariat were thanked for organizing the conference as it was both timely and provided a platform to improve understanding and exchange ideas on the Aft initiative and contribute to the work of the recently-formed WTO Task Force on Aid for Trade. The substantial, high-level and well attended conference (with over 300 participants) reflected substantial interest in the issue, as well as the value and usefulness of the conference.

The conference was opened by Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mr. Winston Cox, Deputy Secretary-General of Commonwealth Secretariat and Ms. Mia Horn Af Rantzien, Chairperson of the WTO Aid for Trade Task Force (Sweden). Presentations on various topics were made by: Professor J. Stiglitz (Colombia University); Mrs. Lakshmi Puri (Director, Division on International Trade in Goods and Services and Commodities, UNCTAD); Mr. David Wakeford (Commonwealth Business Council); Mr. R.P. Lichkus (Lichkus & Associates, South Africa); Mr. S.V. Diwaakar (Consultant, India); Mr. Mohammed Salisu (Africa Development Bank); Mr. Havelock Brewster and Mr. Antoni Estevadeordal, Latin America (Inter-

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