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Foreword

Without intervention, markets often fail to take full account of the environmental and health impacts of economic activity. Environmental and related health requirements in governmental regulations and private standards are generally designed to address legitimate concerns about these impacts.

Such requirements might at first sight appear to be simple technical or procedural norms. On closer scrutiny, however, they have very important implications for trade, in particular for market access and development, influencing employment, infrastructure, environment and social conditions. A number of standards, including environmental requirements, are also used as effective instruments in the race for international competitiveness, as well as to influence the behaviour of independent companies participating in supply chains. New standards in the agri-food sector, for instance, not only aim at assuring food safety and continuously high food quality, they also transfer the associated risk and cost onto suppliers, and are used as effective supply-chain governance tools. The new requirements also lead to a concentration of dedicated suppliers along the supply chain, which creates major problems for small and medium-sized companies.

Developing countries are considerably affected by these trends. A holistic approach is needed to effectively deal with standards, and in particular with environmental and health-related requirements – an approach that goes well beyond trade rules and trade policies. The lack of institutional, technical, infrastructural and managerial capacity in developing countries presents a dual problem: on the one hand, it leads them to adopt a mere reactive, fire-fighting approach to address new environmental requirements; on the other hand, the adjustment process is very onerous and costly, often harming export competitiveness and, in some urgent cases, obliging governments in exporting developing countries to siphon away resources from other areas.

The Trade and Environment Review 2006 examines some specific examples and sectors to show what governments and other key stakeholders in developed and developing countries could do to limit the trade-restricting effects of environmental requirements and to maximize their contribution to sustainable development in developing countries, for example by helping to enhance resource efficiency, lower emission intensity and improve occupational safety. The *Review* also elaborates on how countries could seize the export opportunities arising from more stringent environmental requirements and growing markets for environmentally preferable products.

The *Review* highlights the fact that the role of WTO rules and disciplines for limiting the trade-restrictiveness of environmental requirements is often overestimated. WTO Agreements can also do little to overcome the supply-related capacity constraints of exporting developing countries or contribute to turning environmental requirements into a catalyst for sustainable development. This *Review* addresses these crucial issues, including what UNCTAD can do, in particular in the context of the new Consultative Task Force on Environmental Requirements and Market Access for Developing Countries, and the UNCTAD/FAO/IFOAM International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture.

The *Review* argues that exporting developing countries will have to become much more strategic and proactive in coping with environmental requirements. No amount of external leadership, action or assistance can substitute for domestic awareness, commitment and cooperation. In addition, however, developing countries need to vigorously defend their interests, both in the WTO with regard to mandatory requirements, and along supply chains with regard to voluntary stand-

ards, with a view to limiting negative impacts at the design stage and discrimination during implementation of new environmental requirements. Furthermore, these countries should learn to exploit new market opportunities created by new requirements.

It is my hope that this issue of the *Trade and Environment Review* will fulfil an important function of awareness-raising and international consensus building on key issues that have a bearing on the interaction between trade expansion and liberalization, environmental protection and development policies in order to achieve a triple win in these three areas. Indeed these are important aspects of UNCTAD's mission. I also hope that it will encourage closer development cooperation reflecting the shared responsibility of both developed and developing countries.



Supachai Panitchpakdi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD

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