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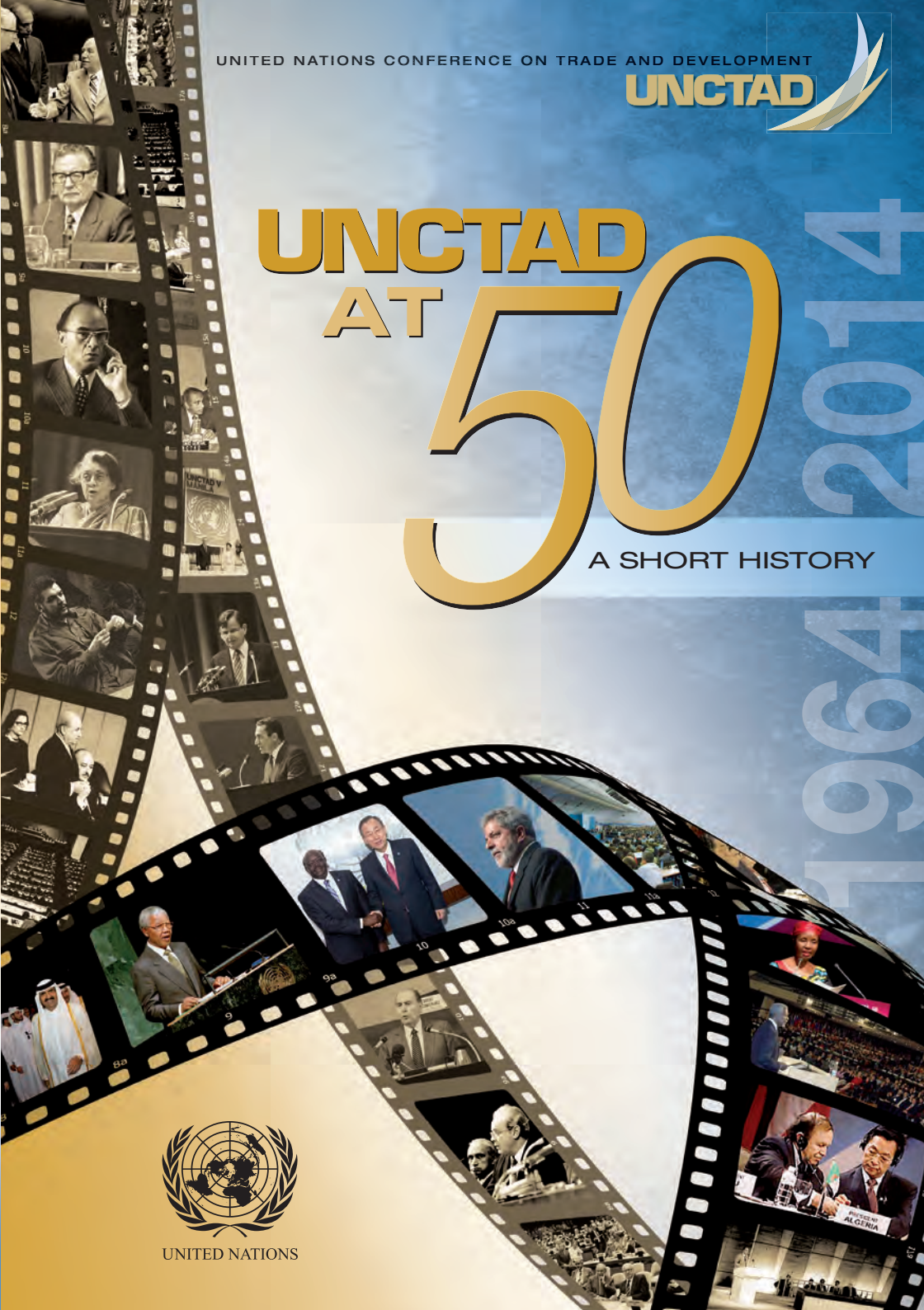


UNCTAD AT 50

A SHORT HISTORY



UNITED NATIONS



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FOREWORD

Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD

When we began planning the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the idea of writing a book about the organization arose. This would not be the first work on the history of UNCTAD – we had published books to mark the twentieth and fortieth anniversaries. Both of these earlier publications were written by officials working at the UNCTAD secretariat and, between them, covered the period up to 2004. To contribute a new and wider historical dimension, this time it seemed appropriate to take a different approach.

By seeking an author outside the organization, it would be possible to offer an independent assessment of UNCTAD's origins, the way in which it has evolved and the international events and geopolitical forces that have helped to shape it. An external voice could be more impartial, both in choosing what to cover and in how to broach the sensitivities inherent to any history. Moreover, a non-institutional view could make the book more interesting for those less familiar with the internal workings of the United Nations and the multilateral system.

In John Toye, who graciously accepted to write the book, UNCTAD found an author who is both a renowned development economist with many years in academia and has some first-hand knowledge of the organization, having worked briefly at the secretariat. Mr. Toye's research and publications encompass themes and areas closely related to UNCTAD and its work, most notably the political economy of development, international economic institutions and the history of economic thought. He is co-author, with his son Richard, of *The UN and Global Political Economy: Trade, Finance, and Development*, part of the United Nations Intellectual History Project Series, which included an account and historical analysis of UNCTAD's creation and development.

While Mr. Toye met representatives of UNCTAD member countries and secretariat officials, past and present, when preparing the book, this volume very much represents his own personal vision. It is neither a negotiated document nor an official history. In the introduction which follows, Mr. Toye sets out the rationale for the book's content and structure, as well as the constraints he faced. Undoubtedly, individuals within and outside UNCTAD will disagree with some of Mr. Toye's views, methodology, choice of issues and analysis. Through the years, though, UNCTAD

has acted as a forum that brings together people, countries and organizations with differing views and experiences. This has resulted in a richness of thought that is part of UNCTAD's history. The decision to publish an independently written book is very much in this spirit.

The value of independent thinking and debate has been a hallmark of UNCTAD, since that day in June, 50 years ago, when a confident South gathered in Geneva to push for major reforms to the multilateral framework that governed the post-war global economy. As Mr. Toye aptly describes it, the first Conference was “a drama of global collective bargaining between rich and poor nations”.

By creating UNCTAD and its secretariat, the 1964 Geneva Conference added a permanent institutional fixture to the multilateral landscape with a responsibility “to formulate principles and policies on international trade and related problems of economic development”, as noted in the Conference's outcome document. Moreover, and signalling a move beyond the principles that had previously led to the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), it was agreed that “economic development and social progress should be the common concern of the whole international community and should, by increasing economic prosperity and well-being, help strengthen peaceful relations and cooperation among nations”.

The UNCTAD that Mr. Toye describes was founded in a different world than we live in today. In those days, trade was the principal source of unsustainable, systemic imbalances and asymmetries in the world economy. Trade perpetuated a skewed and biased international division of labour. Newly independent countries relied on exports of raw materials to their former colonial masters and, in turn, imported high value added manufactured goods from them. This relationship between core and periphery maintained a sharp distinction between North and South. It raised doubts that political independence alone could provide the former colonies with the economic freedom they needed.

With the founding of UNCTAD in 1964, the universal membership of the United Nations explicitly embraced for the first time an inclusive and forward-thinking development perspective. Since then, the United Nations family has built on this vision, notably reaffirming it in 2000 in the landmark Millennium Declaration. The Declaration recognized that “only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future... can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable. These efforts must include policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation”.

From its creation, in working with our member States, we at UNCTAD have striven to build a world economy that serves the interests of all. We have pursued this goal through analytical research and innovative policy proposals, through intergovernmental negotiations and consensus-building and through technical cooperation with developing countries and countries with economies in transition to support their efforts to benefit from globalization.

Today, old distinctions between North and South, and indeed between East and West, have blurred. Some developing countries have emerged to become global players and some countries have transitioned economically; at the same time, some industrialized nations have slumped into prolonged crisis. Other developing countries, such as the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States, face stagnating development prospects and vulnerability that hold back their aspirations.

In this heterogeneous world, the need for renewed multilateralism has never been greater. UNCTAD's work has evolved over its history from a focus on North–South relations and problems, to today's greater emphasis on interdependence between countries and between economic sectors. Problems and challenges now cross borders and disciplines with tremendous speed and ease. We face cataclysmic threats to the global commons, including from climate change, from the financial, food and energy crises and from other dangers, such as conflict and deadly diseases.

These truly global problems – spurred on by our interdependent and interconnected lives – cry out for global solutions and for the provision of truly global public goods. In my mind that is what the multilateral system must be designed to deliver. And so, today we are asking again, as our predecessors did at UNCTAD's first Conference in Geneva, are the structures designed to govern the global economy really “fit for

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