

22 April 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 13th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and
Development (UNCTAD XIII)**

Your Excellency Mr. Hamad bin Abd al-Aziz al-Kawari, Chair of the 13th session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,
Your Excellency Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD,
Your Excellency Mr. Abdelwahad Radi, President of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union,
Distinguished delegates,
Esteemed guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, convened in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 63/204.

Please allow me to begin on a personal note, since I consider it a special privilege to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the United Nations General Assembly.

There are several reasons why this event is of particular importance to me.

First, it takes place in my home country, Qatar, which I had the honour of serving as a diplomat for many years.

Second, before taking up the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly, I had the opportunity as a Qatari diplomat to strongly engage in international development policy.

For example, I served as Chairman of the Group of 77 and China and as Chairman of the General Assembly High Level Committee for South-South Cooperation.

I am proud of my country's contribution to the advancement of the UN's development agenda.

Third, now, as President of the General Assembly, I am focusing much of my efforts on international development issues. Bearing in mind that the General Assembly is the central forum for addressing the international economic and financial order, I have identified "Sustainable development and Global Prosperity" as one of the pillars of my vision for the Assembly's work this session.

And fourth, my current position has led me to fully appreciate the special significance of UNCTAD for the General Assembly.

The First Session of UNCTAD, as many of you know, was convened by resolution of the Economic and Social Council some forty-eight years ago.

Soon afterwards, the UN General Assembly decided to accommodate UNCTAD as an institution under its auspices.

This history indeed binds UNCTAD to the General Assembly in a way that is unique among the UN structure.

Throughout its existence, UNCTAD has closely reflected the concerns of the majority of Member States of the General Assembly in the area of development.

This majority of nations also represents the vast majority of the world's population, a majority that also happens to come from developing countries.

I am here today to reaffirm and renew our shared commitment to the special role that UNCTAD has played – and must continue to play – in giving voice and support to the most urgent needs of the developing nations. The interests of the most developed countries are also addressed when we recall the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation in the area of development.

Furthermore, UNCTAD provides a forum in which all nations can participate in developing the appropriate frameworks for addressing the multifaceted development agenda.

As we gather here in Doha, I would ask you to consider:

What does renewing our commitment to trade and development require of us today, as we are struggling to maintain the General Assembly's commitment to achieving the MDGs by 2015?

How can we renew our commitment to Multilateral negotiations for trade liberalization after Doha Round stalemate?

Where do we want UNCTAD to go in the future?

And what responsibilities must we undertake to guide it there?

In considering these questions, I would highlight that UNCTAD was established in 1964 to fill a void in the institutional framework created during the climactic years of World War Two, to manage international economic affairs.

As such, UNCTAD was convened as a complement to two important United Nations Conferences that took place in the 1940s.

The first of the two conferences was held at Bretton Woods in 1944 and established two of the main pillars of the post-war international architecture -- the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The second Conference was the United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment that gave rise to the GATT in 1946.

The main purpose of those institutions, understandably, was to avoid a repetition of the Great Depression and of the world war that it helped to ignite.

As such, the Bretton Woods institutions were focused primarily on establishing rules and mechanisms for harmonizing policies and coordinating policy action among the leading economic powers of the day.

Their role in fostering economic development was clearly secondary.

Twenty years later, UNCTAD was organized by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization to deal with a fundamental new reality.

That is, the wave of decolonization that swept across the world and that also changed forever the constituency structure of the still very young United Nations at that time.

UNCTAD was the expression of the new geopolitical map that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War.

It was also the expression of the high hopes that the world entertained for facilitating the entry of the large number of newly independent and rising nations into world commerce and trade.

UNCTAD's special vocation has been, from the start, to take a comprehensive view of the constantly evolving challenges facing developing countries.

This very same challenge is addressed in parallel through the General Assembly.

A quick review of the main agenda items of the Conference, from its very beginning, reveals that Member States have consistently taken a broad view of the topics embraced under UNCTAD's mandate.

To be sure, issues of trade in goods and services have always been at the heart of UNCTAD's deliberations.

But it is just as clear that the UNCTAD agenda has, from its inception, prominently included issues of money and finance, and aid and access to technology.

It has also included what was once referred to as “institutional arrangements, methods and machinery,” which we today call “systemic reform” and “global governance”.

Where I think UNCTAD has been most successful has been in helping Member States to think creatively and constructively about promoting developmental change; foreseeing change and its consequences; and providing essential tools to strengthen Member States’ capacities to foster, and at times, cope with economic change.

It has also been most effective, in my view, when it has been able to build broad international consensus on necessary changes in international policy direction and institutional structures, particularly when it has helped to direct ideas and resources to provide clear and usable policy guidance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We, as Member States, must take controversy and vigorous debate as a sign of life at UNCTAD, not necessarily the mark of dysfunction.

Indeed, we should appreciate that UNCTAD is the place where controversies over global economic change are, can and should be most rigorously analyzed from a development perspective, and where solutions are devised for the good of all.

It is, of course, possible to have too much of a good thing.

It is for you, Member States, to ensure that, in trying to channel this creative differences into productive results, you do not suppress the ultimate wellspring of this very special institution – the demand of people everywhere, especially the world’s poorest and most vulnerable, for a better life.

Within UNCTAD, balance and pragmatism must be the order of the day.

In their absence, trust can be eroded and legitimacy lost.

We, as stakeholders in UNCTAD’s work, must provide appropriate direction to UNCTAD.

To that end, we need to take an honest and realistic look at the problems we face today, in order to define appropriate priorities and target UNCTAD’s resources most effectively.

With you, I look forward to the remarks of Secretary-General Supachai, and to the vigorous debate that will - and must - follow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During this General Assembly session, the Assembly has covered much ground on economic and development matters.

We have organized events on Rio+20, on macroeconomic policies, and on the United Nations activities of development assistance.

In the coming months, we will continue to work hard on those issues.

Next month, for example, the General Assembly will convene two important thematic debates.

On 17 and 18 May, I will co-chair with the United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, a High-Level Thematic Debate on the State of the World Economy.

Yesterday I had the honor to, jointly, co-moderate, with SG Supachai, a high level segment on this issue, where very mind provoking ideas were shared among a number of ministers in charge of trade and development issues.

Along with the many related preparations efforts for that debate, in February I visited the World Bank and the IMF in Washington.

There, I could see the importance of enhancing further the relationship between the UN General Assembly and those institutions, which would reflect positively on the mission of the Assembly.

On 22 May, I will host a thematic debate entitled “The Road to Rio and beyond”, that will provide for an informal discussion of the pending issues in the lead-up to Rio + 20.

I would also highlight that I recently convened briefings of the Chairmanship of the Group of 20 before and after the recent G20 summit meeting in Cannes.

I will continue this practice for the upcoming meeting in Los Cabos in Mexico.

I strongly encourage Member States to continue taking advantage of all of these opportunities.

I firmly believe that the General Assembly has a unique role to play in overcoming the political obstacles that have impaired the international community from effectively working together to tackle the economic and development challenges of our time.

The peoples of the world need the UN General Assembly and the General Assembly needs the wholehearted engagement of its Member States.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Let me finish by wishing you a successful conference.

UNCTAD and its distinguished Membership can always count on my full support.

Thank you.