SUSTAINABLE FREIGHT TRANSPORT SYSTEMS CAN BOOST GLOBAL TRADE AND DRIVE UP DEVELOPMENT

Key stakeholders gather at UNCTAD 14 to consider common international framework for sustainable freight transport

Geneva, Switzerland, 1 July 2016 – Stakeholders with varied perspectives will congregate at the UNCTAD four-yearly ministerial conference taking place in Nairobi, on 17–22 July 2016, to reflect among other issues on the core elements required for a common international framework for sustainable freight transport.

With the interpretation of sustainability in the freight sector varying from country to country and region to region, as well as among various industry players, the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development – UNCTAD 14 – provides an opportunity to discuss sustainable freight transport, highlights its tenets and considers ways in which different stakeholders are approaching and implementing sustainability principles in freight transport that promote a balancing act between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of freight transport. By defining the scope of sustainable freight transport and setting related goals and performance tracking mechanisms, inter alia, a common international framework would promote a shared vision of what sustainability in freight transport entails and support the development and implementation of considered and coherent sustainable freight transport policies and solutions. Ultimately, the framework would help to contribute towards effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Global freight transport volumes are expected to more than quadruple by 2050, driven in particular by economic growth in developing countries. This is expected to be accompanied by an increase in South-South trade and account for one third of global trade in 2050, compared to 15 per cent in 2010.

Against that background, a round table at UNCTAD 14 entitled Sustainable transportation for the 2030 Agenda: Boosting the arteries of global trade, organized with the Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport will bring together government representatives, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups and academia as well as key industry players from shipping, road haulage and logistics sectors and financial institutions, among others. Participants at the round table will:

- Discuss the key principles of sustainable freight transport and identify core elements required to establish a common international framework for sustainable freight transport;
- Create a shared vision of what sustainable freight transport entails:
• Identify key stakeholders and partners and their respective roles;
• Identify needs and gaps as well as next steps aimed at establishing an agreed common international framework for sustainable freight transport.

The discussions will set the pace for future action, and articulate the way forward including in terms of relevant follow-up actions by UNCTAD and its development partners.

In 2013, the transport sector accounted for nearly 64 per cent (3,716 million tons of oil equivalent) of final global oil consumption and is projected to account for 82 per cent of the increase in global liquid fossil fuel consumption over the 2008–2035 period. Reflecting its heavy dependence on oil for propulsion, the transport sector accounted for about 23 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion.

While the freight transport sector has generally received less attention in comparison with passenger transport, its critical importance for the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. There is a growing awareness of the strategic importance of the freight transport sector not only as an economic sector in its own right, but also as an enabler of trade and sustainable development. Sustainable freight transport systems entail, among other features, the ability to provide transportation that is viable, safe, socially inclusive, accessible, reliable, affordable, fuel-efficient, environment-friendly and resilient to shocks and disruptions, including those caused by climate change and natural disasters.

The sustainability of the sector has gained greater visibility and recognition on the international policy agenda, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda. While no single Goal was directly and explicitly dedicated to transport or freight transport in particular, a number of transport-related targets were set. Several Sustainable Development Goals are, to some extent, dependent on transport as a vital “enabler” to meet the corresponding targets.

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