

# Conference Announcement: Trade Policy and Sustainability: Regional Approaches

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The *International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development* (Geneva) and the *Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development* (Berkeley) will hold on February 1 & 2, 1999, a Dialogue titled "Trade policy and sustainability: the regional approaches". The Dialogue will focus on regional integration approaches to addressing the issues of trade liberalisation and sustainable development. It will take place at the "Centre International des Conférences de Genève" (CICG), 15 rue de Varembé, in Geneva.

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## [Conference Draft Agenda](#)

### 1. Context

Following the reasoning of Agenda 21 adopted by the international community in Rio de Janeiro on June 12, 1992, an open trade system makes possible a more efficient allocation and use of resources and thereby contributes to an increase in production and incomes while lessening demands on the environment. A sound environment, on the other hand, provides the ecological and other resources needed to sustain growth and underpin trade expansion. The challenge among these goals is to ensure that trade and environment policies are consistent, mutually supportive and reinforce the process of sustainable development.

At the global level, the GATT/WTO system has systematically debated principal aspects of the interaction between trade and environment over the past six years. Work in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment has been analytically focused on important aspects of this interaction. However, to date, this body has not been able to provide any substantive recommendation to WTO members.

In this context, the exchange and analysis of the practical experiences relating to trade and

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environment which have been pursued within regional trade integration schemes could contribute substantially to the understanding of dynamics between these two complex and interdependent areas.

Indeed, those regions that have been particularly successful in achieving high levels of economic integration seem to have sooner or later confronted the practical problem of providing the means to offset differences in cost arising from differences in environmental standards and regulations while simultaneously preserving an open trade system from trade restriction and distortions.

Moreover, although regional integration schemes are by their nature primarily focused on trade promotion, the emergence of environmental transboundary concerns and the need for preserving shared environmental resources constitute a strong incentive for providing mechanisms in improving environmental performance at regional level. Environmental pressures can thus push regional organisations to design and enforce environmental standards and norms which in their turn have a potential trade impact.

On this basis, the following question should be raised: To what extent do higher levels of economic integration tend to promote a process of convergence in trade and environment policies? In the affirmative, what are the elements that contribute to such a process of convergence and what are the factors determining the dynamics and nature of it?

This Dialogue will seek to begin answering these questions by exchanging information and analysing different regional integration approaches and their impact as first steps in determining whether and how these agreements may promote efficient and mutually acceptable policies to deal with the trade and environment linkage.

## **2. Objectives**

The Dialogue is therefore designed to provide the opportunity to review the record of, and prospects for, regional trade and economic arrangements to reconcile trade expansion and environmental policy in the context of sustainable development.

In this context, our three primary objectives for the Dialogue are:

1. to provide an opportunity for cross-fertilisation and to explore the respective regional approaches and policies from a sustainability perspective.
2. to provide the multilateral system with a better understanding of how regional processes deal with trade expansion and sustainability issues. (Please note that our explicit intention is to avoid dealing with GATT article XXIV related issues).
3. to foster the building up of an interactive network of academics, NGO and business representatives, civil servants and policy makers involved in the different regions with matters at the intersection of trade and sustainable development.

More specifically, the Dialogue should contribute to the better understanding of the following subjects:

1. environmental protection opportunities provided by regional economic arrangements
2. policies employed by regional economic arrangements to deal with environment related trade and competitiveness distortions.
3. opportunities and challenges offered by regional integration as a policy platform for the allocation

of responsibility and management at the interface of trade and sustainable development.

### **3. Methodology**

The appropriate method to address these objectives should be based on the promotion of basic knowledge on regional integration and sustainable development issues and on direct exchange of the diversity of regional experiences.

The fulfilment of the objectives will be a function of the intensity and quality of cross-fertilisation that will take place between participants during the meeting. In terms of the format of the Dialogue, it will be thus necessary to:

1. To keep the event at a manageable size so that participants have the opportunity to interact and get to know each other.
2. To discuss issues through interactive panels rather than ex cathedra speeches, in order to promote direct exchange and interaction among participants.

Cross-fertilisation is to be further facilitated by the prior preparation of the following organisational elements:

1. The creation of an in depth preparatory analytical work on substantive issues which are at stake and which are described in the tentative programme.

The analytical work will correspond to issues described in the tentative programme and should be synthetic. Its purpose is to help bring all participants up to speed on current trends and policies in the various regions, which will facilitate immediate and effective cross-fertilisation.

Background papers will be developed in the different regions by participants according to common terms of reference. Writers will be academics, policy makers, members of the private sector or NGO representatives. Accordingly, different papers will deal with issues from a variety of angles.

The papers can describe or compare policies and trends. They can also concentrate on specific but illustrative real life examples (case studies). Finally, the papers will be complemented by relevant related official texts from the different regional agreements.

2. The appropriate selection of a focused, committed and multidisciplinary group of participants specialised in trade and sustainable development at the regional level.

The Dialogue will gather about 80 academics, business and NGO representatives, and officials working on regional integration, as well as multilateral trade.

### **4. Brief introduction to the Organisers**

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development was established in Geneva in September 1996, to facilitate constructive exchange between those working at the intersection of trade and sustainable development including international trade decision makers (negotiators, policy makers and traders) influencers (NGOs, ministries, academics and business) and the general public.

ICTSD conciliates these communities and bridges gaps by providing information, facilitating relationships and helping constituents to fulfil their mutual commitments to achieve sustainable development.

By its very nature, the Centre does not engage in issue advocacy. Trade and sustainable development issues are complex and are thus subject to counterproductive oversimplifications. Their objective analysis rather requires a high degree of intellectual honesty. It is in this spirit that the Centre focuses on building the understanding and capacities of those working in these intersecting areas.

The [Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development](#) is a non-profit, policy-oriented research organisation working at the intersection of environment, development and security in a global economy. Most projects fall within three major programme areas: Governance and Globalisation, Energy-Security-Environment in Northeast Asia, and Northeast Asia Peace and Security. The Governance and Globalisation programme aims to develop innovative approaches to integrating environmental and human rights norms into international trade and financial markets and institutions.

Based in Berkeley, California, the Nautilus Institute focuses primarily on the Asia Pacific region. In addition to agenda-setting research and analysis, it helps to build proactive, trans-Pacific policy advocacy networks, including via the Internet. Its information resources and networking aims to build common ground among analysts, scientific experts, policymakers and NGOs.

Nautilus associates and partners span the region, from Eugene, Oregon to Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore and Melbourne.

This Dialogue project is also sponsored by the [Royal Institute of International Affairs](#) (London).

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