

UNISMUNC XI



Committee: UNCTD

Topics: Mitigating Trade Tensions
Through Tariff Reform and Multilateral
Economic Cooperation

Committee Type: GA

December 7, 2025



Chair: Aadya Dasgupta

Dias: Zoe Strohmeyer

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Conference Schedule

Registration

8:00 am - 9:00 am

Opening Ceremonies

9:00 am - 10:00 am

Committee Session I

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Lunch Break I

12:00 pm - 1:15 pm

Lunch Break II

1:15 pm - 2:30 pm

Committee Session II

2:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Closing Ceremonies

5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Conference Policies

UNISMUNC XI aims to foster debate, bringing students the opportunity to explore a range of topics and encourage collaboration and teamwork between delegates. Be that as it may, UNIS stresses the importance of respectful language as UNISUNC XI will see delegates debating topics that, at times, may be heated or passionate. MUNEX encourages you to remember to stay respectful and mindful of the other students around you. We are so excited about this conference and trust that no issues will arise. The following expectations and policies are designed so that every delegate gets the most out of UNISMUNC.

Attire:

The Dress Code for UNISMUNC is formal Western business attire, and all delegates are expected to comply with this. Exceptions can be made for character purposes in crisis committees at the discretion of the chair. If you have an idea for an outfit for a crisis committee that does not fall into the parameters of traditional Western business attire, please ask your chair for permission before wearing the outfit.

Committee Assignments:

Committee assignments will be made on a first-come-first-served basis based on preference as communicated by the delegation's advisors (or individual delegates in the case of independent delegates), in order of receipt of preference. Before being assigned to a committee, payment must be received. If payment is not submitted promptly, delegations face the risk of not receiving committee assignments of their choice.

Expectations in Committee:

As you engage in debates, we ask that delegates maintain politeness and respect at all times. While we recognize that you are representing your country's views, it is essential to express these perspectives without crossing the line into disrespectful or confrontational behavior.

Please respect one another when delegates are giving speeches. Only one delegate may speak at a time during moderated caucuses. To speak during a moderated caucus, you must raise your placard and wait to be recognized by the chair. During speeches, no ad hominem attacks will be allowed, should they occur, the subject will have the right to reply. Remember to be cognizant of your words and actions, and to listen to everyone's views and positions.

The Committee Chairs and Secretariat members are responsible for determining disruptive behavior.

Examples of disrespectful behavior may include but are not limited to:

- Speaking without being recognized,
- Use of cell phones,
- Note-passing unrelated to the committee,
- Use of technology when not allowed,
- Verbal, physical, or sexual harassment of other delegates.

The pre-writing of any resolution/directive clauses, crisis notes, or speeches is strictly forbidden and will be penalized. This does not include opening remarks. This does not include any writing during the lunch break, as UNISMUNC committees standardly operate with 'working lunches'.

UNISMUNC has a zero-tolerance policy for any plagiarism. This includes position papers, speeches, and resolutions. Improper citation of quotes and references may result in disqualification from awards or further disciplinary action at the discretion of the chairs.

Pricing:

Please see the registration section for more information. Details on committee assignments are below.

Spectators:

Please be aware that UNISMUNC XI does not allow unregistered spectators. Student spectators are strictly prohibited. All advisors and delegates must be registered and pay the required fee(s). Non-compliance with this policy will result in exclusion from future invitations. We expect all

participating delegations to respect this policy. The Secretariat reserves the right to have any unregistered spectators removed from committee chambers and escorted off of the premises if necessary, as they see fit.

Technology:

All crisis committees are strictly no-tech. Neither laptops nor cell phones will be permitted during committee sessions in crisis committees.

General Assembly (GA) committees allow technology exclusively for the purpose of resolution writing. Delegates will be permitted to use their laptops to work on resolutions during unmoderated caucuses and outside of the committee chamber when allowed by the chair. It is, however, not permitted to use technology when a fellow delegate is speaking or during committee chambers during moderated caucuses. This includes your own speeches, so please write any notes by hand or have your opening remarks printed before the conference.

Awards Criteria:

UNISMUNC Chairs, Diases, and, in the case of crisis committees, Crisis Directors will work together to holistically evaluate delegates based on their performance throughout the entire day of debate. This includes:

- speeches given during moderated caucuses,
- performance during unmoderated caucuses (not only making one's voice heard but also including everyone in the discussion),
- writing/presenting resolutions/directions, especially those that pass,
- in crisis committees, as well as the detail and sophistication of crisis arcs.

Letter From Chair

Greetings Delegates,

As your chairs, Aadya Dasgupta and Zoe Strohmeier, we are deeply privileged and excited to serve you as chairs of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Both Zoe and I are juniors at the United Nations International School and have been a part of high school Model UN for almost three years. Model UN has been an immensely educational experience for both Zoe and me, as we have become stronger and more confident speakers through committee participation and preparation. For any new delegates, here is some advice: Being prepared is always better. As the chair of this conference, writing a working paper or research notes will boost the success of your conference. During my first conference, having my position paper and outside research proved to be extremely helpful, as it gave my speeches more depth and gave me more confidence. The most important piece of advice is to do as much outside research as possible. This conference is not the type of situation where the background guide and current situation information will be enough. As policies on tariffs are constantly changing, it will be a great advantage if you understand the general idea of what is going on up to the conference. In terms of a position paper, it is preferred that you submit it 1-2 days before the deadline, as we will have more time to read and acknowledge the work you put in to it. In terms of the actual conference, put yourself out there! The beginning of the conference is where people will see who they want to align with, so it is of immense importance that you try to stand out. The speaking time that you do will have a great impact on how the chair views you as a delegate. As for a bit about your chairs, I, Aadya, am 16 years old, and in junior year. I play for my school's varsity soccer team and am a part of the debate team. I was born and raised in NYC, and as was my dias Zoe. Zoe is originally from Germany and Timor-Leste and is a part of the school's volleyball team. We look forward to hearing from each of you. If you guys have any questions, feel free to reach out to either of us via email: 27adasgupta@unis.org or 27zstrohmeier@unis.org.

Sincerely,

Your chairs, Aadya and Zoe

A Brief Overview of the Committee

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was established in 1964 by the UN General Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. The current Secretary-General is Rebeca Grynspan, the first female to hold the position, and has been running the organization since 2021. This was also the year of the most recent UNCTAD council meeting, which happens every four years, and hosts 195 member states. While it is one of the branches of the UN, the UNCTAD is also an intergovernmental organization and a part of the UN secretariat. The organization reports to the UN council and the economic and social council, but it also has its own membership, budget, and leadership. The UNCTAD helps better countries in several ways; its core areas of work include trade, investment, finance, and technology from a development perspective. They conduct policy analysis, provide technical assistance, and facilitate consensus-building among nations.

However, the organization does possess a main focus for helping developing countries with trade and accessing the global market. One of their biggest issues lately has been assisting developing countries with the damage that recent tariffs have caused to global trade. Much of their work involves analyzing markets and generating data to benefit countries with struggling economies. Much of the work that UNCTAD does for LDCs involves creating and supporting trade systems within Africa, as well as enabling African countries to utilize their natural mineral resources to their benefit rather than for the benefit of other countries. In 2023, UNCTAD worked to assist countries facing challenges ranging from climate change to debt and financial instability. Much of their work is related to helping the dire issue in Palestine. Several reports came through from the UNCTAD, providing more information on the situation and spreading

awareness for aid and support. Their most notable reports include the Trade and Development Report, the World Investment Report, the Technology and Innovation Report, and the Review of Maritime Transport, all of which help shape trade debates, as they give more data and analysis on the issue at hand.

One of the organization's biggest accomplishments was creating a generalized system of preferences (GSP) in 1971, which essentially gave tariffs to manufacturing companies importing agricultural products from developing countries. Implemented in a wide range of first-world countries, GSPs help to make developing goods more expensive to avoid exploitation, and exports from wealthy countries are essentially 'duty-free' as there are fewer taxes imposed. This helps create more of a balance between countries and enables LDCs to access the global market. It is a common occurrence that developing countries, especially in Africa, sell goods cheaply, as they are normally primary and not worth much, and big companies make the products (manufactured goods) and take the majority of the profit.

Committee Procedure

Moderated Caucuses are structured discussions where delegates sign themselves up to give short, regulated speeches. The speaking time and topic of discussion are set when the motion is proposed, and delegates take turns to speak.

Unmoderated Caucuses are divided between a regular unmoderated caucus and a gentleman's unmoderated caucus where everybody remains seated. A regular unmod entails a period free of structured, regulated debate, where delegates can mill about the committee and work with their blocs.

Some actions that are carried over from the usual committee procedure:

- Point of Order
- Point of Information
- Appeal to the Chair
- Suspension of Debate
- Adjournment of Debate
- Closure of Debate
- Roll Call Vote
- Set the Speaker's Time

Written Papers

Resolutions: A piece of writing that outlines possible solutions to a problem and allows the committee to take action. Hopefully towards the end of the committee blocs will work together to write a resolution that can be debated and possibly passed.

Working Papers: The drafts of resolutions, i.e. resolutions before they are voted on by the committee – committee blocs work together to write these, brainstorming and fully outlining detailed solutions to the issues at hand. Then, they are voted on and formally become resolutions.

Topic Background

Tariffs are one of the most important tools for international trade policy. Governments use them to protect industries, import goods, and raise prices to make foreign products less competitive.

By doing so, tariffs encourage people to purchase domestically rather than internationally.

Governments use tariffs to protect their local industries and influence trade. Although tariffs can provide short-term benefits and support for domestic businesses, they often come with long-term repercussions, such as higher consumer prices or tensions with other countries. Currently, tariffs remain strongly challenged, especially in the United States and China, but also in broader global shifts.

Historically, tariffs were supposed to be effective in U.S. economic policy, but often backfired.

For example, the Opium Wars in the 19th century sparked trade restrictions imposed by China on British merchants, ultimately leading to military retaliation. Before World War II, they were used to protect domestic manufactures and agriculture from opposing foreign countries. However, they had negative side effects, because by raising the cost of imported goods, tariffs brought consumer prices higher and slowed economic growth. This effect provoked other countries to retaliate with their own tariffs, inevitably reducing global trade. Due to these issues, postwar economic growth turned into liberalizing agreements. These agreements, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and later on the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Free trade was viewed as a way to expand and lower barriers in order to encourage international partnerships rather than compete in trade. This led to rapid economic growth and integration in the late twentieth century.

Despite this, tariffs remained an instrument of trade policy. Governments use them to defend key industries or punish wrongful practices overseas. There are three primary types of tariffs. Ad valorem tariffs are a percentage of a product's price, varying with price changes. Specific tariffs establish a fixed fee per unit regardless of the value. Lastly, tariff rate quotas apply only after a certain amount of imports has been reached, after which higher tariffs take effect. These three main factors allow policymakers to balance and maintain consumer access to affordable products while protecting domestic producers from competition. Developing countries mostly rely on tariffs to protect vulnerable industries, compared to more developed and wealthier countries, which prefer lower tariffs due to having more resilient economies and encouraging free trade. Recently, in the United States, tariffs have reemerged, becoming a bigger issue in the country. Donald Trump, president of the U.S., argued that the country has faced unfair trade practices, for example, currency manipulation and intellectual property theft, by China. According to the administration, these practices contributed to the U.S.'s trade deficit and weakened domestic manufacturing. Another recurring problem is currency policy, due to China keeps the yuan undervalued, which makes it easier to export cheaply in international markets, causing imbalances in trade. According to Brookings in 2019, such policies are considered forms of manipulation that undercut competitors and alter global markets. In this case, tariffs were meant to correct the imbalances; however, they did not. Additionally, Trump extended tariffs to traditional partners, such as Canada, Mexico, and the European Union, connecting the issue to national security, immigration, and fentanyl trafficking rather than just economic interests. These choices have led to retaliation, ultimately harming domestic farmers and manufacturers that depend on exports. Many supporters believe that this forced China to face trade imbalances, while critics think that the policy mainly raised prices for domestic business and consumers

without resolving deeper structural problems.

Joe Biden had largely maintained tariffs imposed during Trump's presidency, through a bipartisan agreement that trade with China requires precautions due to China being both an economic and strategic rival. However, this approach is done to coordinate trade policy with allies, which frames tariffs as a strategy to strengthen U.S. industries while confronting unfair practices. His administration overall focuses on industrial policy, supply chain resilience, and agreement amongst allies to address trade practices. Advocates view them as a way to reduce imports and encourage domestic production; however, opponents warn that tariffs often fail, and could strain relationships with allies, raise costs for consumers, and start retaliatory measures to harm the U.S. Ultimately, this reflects the shift in the U.S. economy, turning tariffs into a tool to control and manage globalization.

Other than immediate effects, tariffs have significant consequences both geopolitically and strategically. They influence global supply chains, international relationships, and the balance of economic growth or power. For example, if tariffs are used repeatedly, it could encourage other countries to expand trading partners, invest in domestic markets, or develop trade blocs to avoid dependence on other nations that could be seen as rivals. They can also be used in negotiations, allowing states to pressure partners to adopt or agree to international pacts. However, this could prolong tariff disputes, which could escalate into trade wars, avoid global cooperation, and increase market instability. Tariffs have a complex role; they are not solely for economic use but also can be intertwined with national security choices and influence, shaping both domestic and global policy.

These circumstances are representative of tariffs being both a risk and an opportunity. They can either serve as a shield to protect companies or industries or act as a weapon against foreign practices. Additionally, tariffs can provoke, disrupt supply chains, and deepen geopolitical tensions. Currently, global trade is becoming more interconnected, and competition with China is intensifying, leading to tariffs being the main tool of U.S. policy. Their future has the chance to shape not only domestic outcomes but also the stability of international trade relations in a few years.

For delegates, the focus should be on creating strategies to promote international cooperation by negotiating agreements or treaties by implementing precautions to prevent manipulation, and ensuring economic safeguards with diplomatic solutions. Delegates are expected to understand and analyze the implications of tariffs, propose and work toward resolutions or policies to maintain international trade while protecting national interests.

Current Situation

Tariffs have become one of the most contentious issues in international trade, with the United States at the center of escalating disputes. In January 2025, President Trump ordered a reassessment of trade relations with major partners, including China, Mexico, and Canada. By February, a trade conflict had erupted with both Mexico and Canada, as the U.S. tied tariffs to their alleged inaction on fentanyl trafficking. Tariffs, once primarily an economic tool, were increasingly wielded as leverage on non-trade issues.

In March, U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports rose from 10% to 20%, justified by accusations of currency manipulation through China's policy of pegging the yuan to the dollar. On April 2, known as "Liberation Day," the U.S. imposed reciprocal tariffs—setting a baseline 10% rate on nearly all imports. The European Union quickly retaliated with higher tariffs on U.S. steel and aluminum, demonstrating the speed with which protectionist measures could spread across the global economy.

Over the following months, tariffs expanded dramatically. On March 12, the U.S. placed 25% tariffs on global steel and aluminum imports, which were later doubled to 50% in June. By early April, a universal 10% tariff applied to nearly all imports, while China faced extreme rates of up to 145%. China retaliated with 34% tariffs on U.S. goods. Although a partial U.S.-China de-escalation was reached in May, measures remained largely in place, and further disputes soon reignited. By August, reciprocal tariffs ranging from 10% to 40% applied to more than 60 countries, with some rates exceeding 100% on goods from Brazil, Canada, and India.

The consequences have been widespread. These sweeping measures disrupted global supply chains, raised consumer prices, and fractured long-standing trade partnerships. The uncertainty surrounding U.S. tariff “pauses” and unilateral extensions created volatility in financial markets. The WTO and IMF both warned of lasting damage: global trade growth in 2025 is projected at less than 1%, while total trade volumes could decline by 3–7%. Meanwhile, the U.S. itself continues to face a severe trade deficit, with tariffs framed by Washington as a tool to revive domestic industry but criticized abroad as destabilizing and unlawful. Several WTO complaints have been filed against the U.S., though the dispute settlement system itself remains under strain.

The fallout has not been limited to economics. Many U.S. allies—including the EU, Japan, and South Korea—have reconsidered the reliability of the U.S. as a trade partner. Several states are actively pursuing alternative supply chains and deepening ties with emerging economies to insulate themselves from Washington’s unpredictable trade policy. For developing countries, the consequences are especially acute. Many Least Developed Countries (LDCs), particularly in Africa and Asia, rely heavily on exports to the U.S. Tariffs of 25–50% on labor-intensive industries such as textiles and agriculture threaten the livelihoods of populations already living on subsistence wages. Countries such as Lesotho and Cambodia are especially vulnerable, as reduced U.S. consumer demand directly undercuts their export-driven economies.

By late summer 2025, the world was facing what many economists describe as one of the most unpredictable and far-reaching tariff regimes in modern history. The combination of aggressive U.S. enforcement, retaliatory countermeasures, and rising protectionism worldwide has produced not only economic uncertainty but also a broader shift in geopolitical alignment. If left unresolved, these tensions risk undermining the multilateral trading system, exacerbating poverty in LDCs, and pushing the global economy toward fragmentation rather than cooperation.

Bloc Positions

Western Bloc

The Western Bloc, along with the United States, the European Union, Canada, and other high-income economies, is in disagreement on tariff reform. The U.S. has of late employed active tariffs in recent years, marketing them as tools for the protection of the domestic industry and corrective measures against intellectual property right abuses, specifically with China. The EU, Canada, and other Western allies support a rules-based multilateral trading arrangement under the WTO. These states have pushed back at unilateral U.S. action, grumbling at the WTO and responding with countervailing duties. Within the bloc itself, there is a conflict between the requirements of defending domestic industries and the benefits of open, liberalized trade.

African and Middle Eastern Bloc

Many African and Middle Eastern countries are very vulnerable to tariff regimes since they produce raw materials, clothing, and agricultural products. For African Least Developed Countries (LDCs), U.S. and EU tariff hikes threaten their economic stability since they all rely mostly on Western market access for job maintenance and growth. Middle Eastern nations, particularly the oil-exporting countries, are less directly impacted but still worried about the disturbance of global demand from trade wars. Together as a bloc, the nations tend to favor tariff reform that diminishes protectionism, maintains preferential trade access, and protects LDCs from unwarranted economic damage.

Latin American Bloc

Latin America is directly influenced by U.S. tariff policy by geography and economic reliance. Mexico, especially, has experienced direct tariff escalation tied to matters unrelated to trade, such as fentanyl smuggling. Brazil, Argentina, and other exporters have also been hurt by U.S. actions, raising agricultural and industrial tariffs. Latin American countries are therefore strong supporters of reforms that limit the application of unilateral tariffs, encourage multilateral discipline, and allow developing countries to enjoy stable access to world markets. At the same time, the majority of the region is moving trade to Asia and intraregional blocs like Mercosur in a bid to reduce reliance on U.S. demand.

Asian Bloc

Asia has major economic powers and vulnerable exporters, and therefore is among the most advanced blocs in tariff reform. China has been the biggest target of U.S. tariffs at levels up to 145% on particular items and reciprocated in kind. Other Asian economies, such as Japan and South Korea, have been concerned about volatility and urged a return to WTO-based resolutions. Southeast Asian exporters such as Cambodia and Vietnam are concerned about losing competitive access to U.S. and EU markets due to increased tariffs. Thus, the bloc favorably supports the reduction of tariff escalation, the defense of global trade institutions, and stronger regional supply chains to reduce its Western market dependence.

Questions to Consider

- How has my country been affected by tariffs, and what tariffs have they imposed?
- What is my country's history with tariffs, and which tariffs are in place? Do these tariffs benefit trade for my country?
- How can we balance the production of goods between countries? Would my country gain more wealth if it could produce more products, and is it possible?
- What are other ways of addressing global economic and political issues without weaponizing tariffs?

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