

Parallel Session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade

【Basic Information】

Moderator:

Ms. LI Dongning News Anchor of China Global Television Network (CGTN)

Opening Remarks:

Mr. SHENG Qiuping Vice Minister, Ministry of Commerce of China

Ms. WANG Chunying President, The Export-Import Bank of China

Mr. Gerd Müller Director General, United Nations Industrial Development Organization
(Mr. ZOU Ciyong delivered remarks on behalf of Mr. Müller)

Launching and Presentation:

Mr. YAO Shenhong Director, Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO

Mr. Francesco Azzena Project Coordinator, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO

Mr. CUI Weijie Vice President, Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation

Ms. Dima Al-Khatib Director, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
(video message)

Ms. LI Shuyin Deputy Director General, China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges

Panel Discussion:

Mr. Kanishka Raj Rathore Programme Officer, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO

Mr. Sim Vireak Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kingdom of Cambodia

Mr. James Kimonyo	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to China
Ms. SONG Yuyan	Secretary General, Green Partnership of Industrial Parks in China
Mr. Ludwig O. Daza	Director General's Representative & Manager of Ecozone Development Department of Philippine Economic Zone Authority
Ms. LI Shuyin	Deputy Director General, China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges
Mr. YAO Shenhong	Director, Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO
Mr. Chalee Khansiri	Director of International Industrial Economics Division, Office of Industrial Economics, Ministry of Industry of the Kingdom of Thailand
Ms. Aida Zainol Abidin	Chief Corporate Officer, Kulim Technology Park Corporation Sdn. Bhd. of Malaysia
Ms. XU Chun	Secretary General, Global Alliance on AI for Industry and Manufacturing Centre of Excellence & Assistant Dean, Shanghai AI Research Institute

【Brief Introduction】

The parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade was held in Conference Room C003, 3rd Floor, Office Building C, National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) on the afternoon of November 5, 2025. This parallel session was co-hosted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, and co-organized by China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), China International Import Expo Bureau, and National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai). It consisted of three sections: opening remarks, launching and presentation, and panel discussion.



[Opening Remarks]

Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. SHENG Qiuping, Vice Minister of Ministry of Commerce of China, Ms. WANG Chunying, President of The Export-Import Bank of China, and Mr. Gerd Müller, Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (with Mr. ZOU Ciyong speaking on behalf of Mr. Müller). The speakers shared views on the role of free trade zones (FTZs) amidst the changes of the global economic and trade pattern, the achievements and future directions of China's pilot free trade zones (PFTZs), etc. FTZs, as important carriers of open economies in various countries, are becoming powerful tools to solve development problems and activate growth momentum. In the practice of building FTZs, all countries are exploring development paths that suit their own national conditions. The establishment of PFTZs is an important strategic measure for China to promote reform and opening-up in the new era. Since 2013, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has established 22 PFTZs, forming a nationwide pattern of innovation for reform and opening-up. Taking institutional innovation as the core and high-level opening-up as the direction, the PFTZs have introduced a large number of fundamental and pioneering reform and opening-up measures, and formed 485 innovation outcomes that have been replicated and promoted across the country. They have effectively played the role of a comprehensive experimental platform for reform and opening-up and provided more favorable conditions and broader space for various business entities to develop and cooperate in China. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held recently made strategic arrangements for the main tasks of China's economic and social development in the next five years, including expanding opening-up. It proposed that China will actively expand its independent opening up, implement the strategy of upgrading PFTZs, and build the Hainan Free Trade Port with high standards. The PFTZs were born and thrived because of openness and will continue to explore the path of openness in the future. China is willing to enhance cooperation with UNIDO and share the practical experience in building its PFTZs with the vast number of other developing countries, making FTZs solid bridges connecting the world and promoting open cooperation. At present, FTZs worldwide are confronted with challenges such as the weakening of institutional dividends due to tariff costs, supply chain security taking over efficiency, and the increase in enterprise compliance costs. These challenges need to be addressed through market diversification, value addition, supply chain re-optimization, and rule-driven approaches. The Export-Import Bank of China supports the development of FTZs through special credit, overseas cooperation, and domestic and overseas linkage.

In the future, the Bank will deepen collaborative interaction, strengthen innovation-driven development, stimulate financial vitality, and build a new pattern of cooperation. UNIDO's cooperation with China has achieved remarkable results. Chinese investment has created jobs and opened up markets for developing countries, helping them integrate into the global value chain. FTZs have provided a large number of jobs globally, promoted technology transfer, and enhanced economic resilience. The Organization looks forward to further deepening cooperation with China to contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Mr. SHENG Qiuping, Vice Minister of Ministry of Commerce of China, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and delivered a speech



Ms. WANG Chunying, President of The Export Import Bank of China, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and delivered a speech



Mr. ZOU Ciyong, on behalf of Mr. Gerd Müller, Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and delivered a speech

[Launching and Presentation]

The launching and presentation session featured Mr. YAO Shenhong, Director of Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO, Mr. Francesco Azzena, Project Coordinator of Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO, Mr. CUI Weijie, Vice President of Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ms. Dima Al-Khatib, Director of United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (video message), and Ms. LI Shuyin, Deputy Director General of China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges. The presenters introduced the relevant strategic framework of UNIDO, the development of the UNIDO Industrial Park Platform, the Report on the Development of China's Pilot Free Trade Zones (2025), and the China-UN Global South-South Development Facility. The South-South and trilateral industrial cooperation (SSTIC) model of UNIDO addresses the challenges faced by FTZs, such as imbalanced development, low technology accessibility, and experience fragmentation, through three pillars: systematic knowledge transfer, innovative triangular cooperation, and integration into sustainable global value chains. The UNIDO Centre for South-South Industrial Cooperation in China (UCSSIC China) project has achieved remarkable results. Its fourth phase will expand cooperation in areas such as digital economy and green transformation, while innovating and improving collaboration methods and mechanisms. As a global knowledge base and resource center, the UNIDO Industrial Park Platform (IPP) operates through four major aspects: network building, knowledge dissemination, event organization, and capacity building. It has developed tools such as online courses and training programs, with multiple countries having benefitted from the activities and experience sharing. In the future, IPP will continue to promote knowledge sharing and capacity building. The Report on the Development of China's Pilot Free Trade Zones (2025) incorporates three chapters: Comprehensive Development, Institutional Innovation, and Future Outlook, showcasing the achievements of the construction of PFTZs in 2024. The 22 PFTZs contributed 19.6% of the country's foreign trade and 24.3% of foreign investment, and developed 95 representative institutional innovation outcomes. In the future, they will continue to deepen institutional opening up, strengthen systematic integration of reform measures, and create a new landscape of win-win cooperation. The China-UN Global South-South Development Facility, with budgetary support from China, marks a new stage in China-UN cooperation, focusing on areas such as agriculture, low-carbon development, and digitalization. Through technological cooperation and youth innovation, it will contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The China Center for International Economic and Technical Exchanges will be deeply involved in the implementation of the project.



Mr. YAO Shenhong, Director of Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in launching and presentation



Mr. Francesco Azzena, Project Coordinator of Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in launching and presentation



Mr. CUI Weijie, Vice President of Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in launching and presentation



Ms. Dima Al-Khatib, Director of United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, virtually attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in launching and presentation through a video message



Ms. Li Shuyin, Deputy Director General of China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in launching and presentation

[Panel Discussion 1: Unlocking FTZs and SEZs for Industrial and Trade Growth]

The panel discussion on "Unlocking FTZs and SEZs for Industrial and Trade Growth" was moderated by Mr. Kanishka Raj Rathore, Programme Officer of Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO. Panelists included Mr. Sim Vireak, Under-Secretary of State of Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Mr. James Kimonyo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to China, Ms. SONG Yuyan, Secretary General of Green Partnership of Industrial Parks in China, and Mr. Ludwig O. Daza, Director General's Representative & Manager of Ecozone Development Department of Philippine Economic Zone Authority. The panelists discussed how to unlock the vitality in FTZs and special economic zones (SEZs) and enhance the development momentum of industries and trade. Some countries are still in the planning and construction stage of FTZs. They need to balance the development with existing SEZs, draw on experience in differentiated development of countries like China, and rely on their own geographical advantages and free trade agreement resources to attract foreign investment and promote industrial development. Facing challenges such as the limited scale of zones, poor government intervention, and low service efficiency, those FTZs need to enhance their competitiveness through conceptual changes and one-stop services. Panelists also emphasized that creating a friendly business environment is the key to attracting investment. It is necessary to promote business environment reform, simplify the enterprise registration process, improve infrastructure, enhance supply chain coordination, and introduce tax incentives and other policies. At the same time, attention should be paid to policy harmonization and consistency, and South-South cooperation should be leveraged to promote technology transfer and knowledge sharing. China's SEZs as a role model have achieved high-quality development through policy-driven approaches, focusing on leading industries to form industrial clusters while adhering to sustainable development standards. The Chinese zones have accumulated rich experience in green transformation. By spatial layout optimization in the planning stage, as well as green construction and management innovation in the operation stage, China is currently developing net-zero zones and forming replicable standards and guidelines. Moreover, economic zones in certain countries have encouraged private sector participation through policy adjustments, focusing on the development of manufacturing and services and promoting sustainable, all-round development. In the future, many zones will strengthen cooperation with international organizations, promote the construction of science and technology innovation parks, improve intellectual property protection, and create specialized parks for specific industries.



Mr. Sim Vireak, Under-Secretary of State of Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kingdom of Cambodia, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 1



Mr. James Kimonyo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to China, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 1



Ms. SONG Yuyan, Secretary General of Green Partnership of Industrial Parks in China, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 1



Mr. Ludwig O. Daza, Director General's Representative & Manager of Ecozone Development Department of Philippine Economic Zone Authority, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 1



Mr. Kanishka Raj Rathore, Programme Officer of Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of UNIDO, moderated the panel discussion 1 of the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade

[Panel Discussion 2: Collaborative Strategies for FTZ and SEZ Development]

The panel discussion on "Collaborative Strategies for FTZ and SEZ Development" was moderated by Ms. LI Shuyin, Deputy Director General of China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges. Panelists included Mr. YAO Shenhong, Director of Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO, Mr. Chalee Khansiri, Director of International Industrial Economics Division, Office of Industrial Economics, Ministry of Industry of the Kingdom of Thailand, Ms. Aida Zainol Abidin, Chief Corporate Officer of Kulim Technology Park Corporation Sdn. Bhd. of Malaysia, and Ms. XU Chun, Secretary General of Global Alliance on AI for Industry and Manufacturing Centre of Excellence & Assistant Dean of Shanghai AI Research Institute. The panelists explored how to promote the cooperation and coordination among FTZs and SEZs. It is noted that inclusive and sustainable industrial development should be the core mission of FTZs and SEZs. Drawing on the successful models like Shenzhen SEZ of China, economic zones are suggested to leverage the SSTIC model, focus on key areas such as ending hunger, sustainable supply chains, and climate action, and promote innovation in financial services and international cooperation. Thailand spotlights manufacturing development and attracts foreign investment through tax incentives to build characteristic zones such as the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC). In the future, the country will prioritize promoting sustainable development, regional integration, technological cooperation, and talent cultivation, while addressing challenges such as duplicate government agencies, shortage of funds, and geopolitical issues. The Kulim Science and Technology Park in Malaysia attracts high-tech investment and creates numbers of jobs, through international cooperation, supply chain ecosystem improvement, and service capacity upgrading. In the future, it will continue to deepen international collaboration, optimize business environment, and promote local talent employment and community development. Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI) is highlighted thanks to its crucial support for the transformation of FTZs and SEZs. By building knowledge networks, optimizing industrial positioning, and constructing innovative ecosystems, economic zones can use AI to raise energy efficiency and build smart parks. To bridge the digital divide and achieve resource sharing and common development, it is necessary to conduct multi-stakeholder project design, strengthen capacity building, and implement pilot cooperation. Cross-sectoral cooperation is also of vital importance to the development of FTZs and SEZs. It is crucial to enhance collaboration among multiple stakeholders including governments, the private sector, and academia, clarify policy guidance, improve infrastructure, promote industry-academia-research integration, pay attention to community participation and environmental sustainability, and achieve coordinated socio-economic development.



Mr. YAO Shenhong, Director of Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation of UNIDO, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 2



Mr. Chalee Khansiri, Director of International Industrial Economics Division, Office of Industrial Economics, Ministry of Industry of the Kingdom of Thailand, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 2



Ms. Aida Zainol Abidin, Chief Corporate Officer of Kulim Technology Park Corporation Sdn. Bhd. of Malaysia, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the discussion



Ms. XU Chun, Secretary General of Global Alliance on AI for Industry and Manufacturing Centre of Excellence & Assistant Dean of Shanghai AI Research Institute, attended the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade and participated in the panel discussion 2



Ms. LI Shuyin, Deputy Director General of China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges, moderated the panel discussion 2 of the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade



Ms. Li Dongning, News Anchor of China Global Television Network (CGTN), hosted the parallel session on Free Trade Zones Driving Industrial Innovation and Global Trade