

Foreword by the WTO Director-General

We live in troubled times. Beyond geopolitical tensions, uncertainty in the global economy, and stalling progress on collective challenges from poverty reduction and hunger to climate change, the world is witnessing the highest level of active conflicts since the end of the Second World War. According to the 2024 Global Peace Index compiled by the Institute of Economics and Peace, a think tank, fewer conflicts are being resolved, while they are becoming more internationalized.

I know from personal experience how calamitous conflict is for the people affected. I have seen the poverty, hunger, and suffering that it brings. And when wars impact international food and energy prices and access, the impacts are felt – most acutely by the poorest people – around the world.

In a very real sense, the multilateral trading system, enshrined first in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947 and then the WTO since 1995, was at its origin a peace project. In the wake of the horrors of World War II and the breakdown of global trade that preceded it in the 1930s, the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 made reviving trade a central objective of the postwar economic order. The objective was peace, prosperity, and stability through interdependence and the promotion of international trade. And looking back at the past 80 years, it has generally worked well for large parts of the WTO membership and their populations. Trade has contributed to unprecedented poverty reduction and prosperity, and great powers remained at peace with each other. Yet as we have seen, conflict around the world has increased – and not just in regions that have remained on the margins of international trade. In addition, tensions among great powers are on the rise.

The return of conflict in an age of global economic integration raises questions about whether, and if so, how trade and the trading system play a role in building and maintaining peace at the national, regional or global level.



This publication, “Pathways to Sustainable Trade and Peace”, seeks to take a fresh look at the nexus between trade and peace in light of contemporary realities. More specifically, it examines the contributions of a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector.

This discussion, like the publication itself, owes a great deal to a group of fragile and conflict affected states (FCS) – called the g7+ WTO Accessions Group – which took a special interest in the connections between trade and peace as they pursued membership in the Organization.

As WTO membership moves towards universality, with 38 governments having successfully negotiated membership since 1995, bringing the total number of members to 166, FCS have accounted for a growing share of accession applicants. The most recently completed accessions were from FCS, notably Afghanistan and Liberia in 2016, and Comoros and Timor-Leste in 2024, and FCS constitute about half of the 22 remaining ones. While integrating FCS into

global trade is not easy, it offers opportunities to make the multilateral system more sensitive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable countries and people.

With contributions from 31 authors of diverse backgrounds and considerable practical experience in trade, peace, humanitarian issues and development, this volume offers rich evidence, insights and case studies of how trade and peace can continue to support each other when the right conditions prevail. They also offer ideas on how reforming the WTO can help to address vulnerabilities related to fragility and conflict.

Trade is an indispensable part of building the secure, sustainable, and inclusive world we want and need.

But trade alone is insufficient to deliver this world. For trade to yield peace dividends, particularly in the difficult context of FCS, the trade community needs to work with other partners. It is my hope that this volume can help lay the groundwork for such collaboration to advance a 21st century vision of Trade for Peace.



Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Director-General