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# Yaoundé Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO

Yaoundé, Cameroon  
25 March 2026

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament, with the support of the Parliament of Cameroon, in connection with the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14)

PC-WTO/2026/R.2  
16 March 2026

## FAIRNESS AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL THROUGH GLOBAL TRADE

*Discussion paper presented by Mr. Benjamin Kalu,  
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The promise of multilateral trade has always been prosperity for all. Yet after more than seven decades of rule-making under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), that promise remains unequally distributed. We are meeting here in Yaoundé, at the heart of Africa, with a unique opportunity and obligation to reframe the terms of the debate.

The question before us is not simply whether trade is free, but whether it is fair. It is not merely whether markets are open, but whether the rules that govern them enable the industrialization, value addition, and digital transformation that genuine development demands. True fairness in global trade is no longer just a moral plea. It is a structural necessity for global economic survival and supply chain resilience.

### **AfCFTA: A Strategic Anchor for Global Supply Chains**

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade area by membership, represents the most ambitious economic integration project of our era. The AfCFTA should be considered by the WTO not as a competing architecture, but as a building block for a more equitable multilateral order. It is also the ultimate global de-risking mechanism.

Africa offers the blueprint for the diversified supply chain the world desperately needs and we are aggressively building the regulatory framework that supports this. However, we also require aligned global trade rules to physically scale that manufacturing base.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government has moved from mere commitment to implementation. In July 2025, Nigeria became the first AfCFTA State Party to complete and publish a mandatory five-year implementation review, as required by Article 28 of the Agreement. Nigeria also ratified the [AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade](#) in November 2025, signalling continental leadership in digital commerce governance. The Nigerian House of Representatives has reinforced this executive ambition through legislative action, conducting treaty scrutiny hearings, strengthening oversight of trade-related regulatory frameworks and advancing a digital economy legislative agenda.

### **From policy crutch to strategic transition: Reforming SDT**

Fairness in trade cannot coexist with agricultural subsidy regimes that systematically undermine African farmers. Developed economies continue to channel hundreds of billions of dollars annually into domestic agricultural support, distorting global commodity prices and rendering competitive exports from African smallholders structurally unviable. Nigeria's agricultural sector, which employs over 35% of the workforce, cannot thrive in a system designed to reward the already wealthy. This distortion also leaves the global food supply dangerously brittle.

The WTO's principle of special and differential treatment (SDT) was conceived precisely to address such structural imbalances. Yet as repeated African Group proposals and more than 88 reform submissions at the Doha Declaration level have demonstrated, SDT provisions remain largely non-binding, inadequately resourced and perpetually deferred. Reform proposals that seek to "graduate" developing countries out of SDT without addressing the root causes of underdevelopment are not solutions.

### **The implementation mandate of national parliaments**

Trade agreements require legislative ratification, budgetary appropriation, regulatory enactment and democratic accountability. The strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of the WTO is a prerequisite for legitimacy and durability. Parliaments that represent billions of citizens in the Global South must have a structured, formal role in shaping WTO rules, not merely in ratifying outcomes negotiated without their meaningful participation.

Integrating parliaments is not about slowing down global trade. It ensures trade rules are actually implemented fairly and durably on the ground. This Conference itself is evidence of what is possible. We must build on it.