

Dear members, invitees, online participants

It's an honour to be here with you all in Cape Town and be part of the opening of this exciting Summit. Presenting WFTO is always a wonderful thing to do, as the organisation is so interesting, and needed in this world **where businesses are often making a race to the bottom**, and where our members are working on a daily basis to make a difference and **showcase every time again that other business models are possible. Being part of this Business Revolution is a privilege.**

We all know that the world is facing difficult times. The unacceptable **genocide in Gaza**, the **ongoing war in Ukraine**, and so many wars that never reach the front papers worldwide. The environmental triple crises: biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change, knowing the planet, and all life on it, are suffering from human-made **disasters**. An economic system that reached its sustainable limits long ago, is still seen as the way to go. It has proven difficult to get rid of the shareholders' capitalistic system, on the contrary, many (political and economic) powers are doing everything to maintain it as it is. Populist leaders, chosen as President, denying climate change or broader: science as a whole. The gap between rich and poor is growing, intolerance to each other is increasing, and I can keep going. Which I'm not going to do. Being an optimist is a moral duty, so I will focus on all good things happening in this world too, and looking at the activities of our members it is easy to be positive!

It is wonderful to see that in all corners of the world entrepreneurs are making this world a better place, and producing excellent quality products without harming the environment and taking good care of their employees and producers. That is the way to go, and a good strategy to change the economic system in a sustainable way.

Some highlights from the last few years: Last year we renewed our website, as you are all aware. With fresh new branding and a well functioning member search. Well, you as members can make it even better by ensuring the information you share is relevant to potential partners and buyers. We worked hard on the GS Review, to implement the recommendations and to improve the system. We simplified the forms for the SAR, without saying it is simple. But for having a credible label as "Fully guaranteed Fair Trade Enterprise" it is needed to have all that information. The label is not for free. I always say that WFTO is the Champions League for sustainable businesses and that requires some effort to reach it. So, yes, you have to do something to earn the certificate for your businesses and show the logo with pride.

Nevertheless, my personal opinion is to make the SARs much more in line with the new narrative of WFTO, to attract new enterprises that do not automatically see themselves as part of the fair Trade movement, but do comply with all the 10 FT principles, as they are quite synonymous with the SDGs. Next month the application form will also be online.

We launched the Environmental Solution Hub, a platform for all SMEs —broader than our network— to help improve their environmental performance by providing concrete and practical answers to real-world questions. It is a controlled AI geared platform, that can be used in all languages. It seems to be a big success as it has more members and dynamics than comparable platforms (according to the makers, Ubuntu).

We are still the implementation partner of the UNHCR's MADE51 programme, providing opportunities to refugees living and working in camps. WFTO's role allows to execute several processes to support them with Seed Funding, artisan training, marketing and event organisation.

On a more long term strategic level: We published our Theory of Change. It is a simple strategy, though more complex in implementation, as is often the case with structural change. What WFTO differentiates from other business networks is that all our members are truly sustainable, not only having a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) policy, but have a business model that has as DNA to be completely sustainable, fair and green. We are not a certification scheme to check on one topic, like most of the certification schemes, like organic, fair price for a commodity, etc. We also don't have the label as a business model, it is from and for the members. The WFTO principles are comprehensive because we believe that a fundamentally flawed economic and trade system cannot be improved by simply making it a bit greener or more social. We believe in system change, as the only way to go and increase the number of "Future Fit businesses", like our members are. I know that too many people in the world still have the perception that we are into charity, "helping poor people". We are not. WFTO is a movement of serious businesses, that put people and planet on top of their priorities, while making profit. And, yes of course, that will also help fighting poverty, but also climate change. It will also help to achieve gender equality and having transparent businesses. Also objectives that will help to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 17 SDGs.

Together with other networks of entrepreneurs that execute alternative business models, like social enterprises, mission driven businesses, and steward-owned businesses that put sustainability at the core of their reason to be, as their DNA, we are working hard to build the new economy. Additionally, as a political movement, we advocate for decision-makers to implement policies that create an enabling environment for these businesses to flourish. This, all together, we see as the #BusinessRevolution that is needed in this world to create a better place for all. In the North, South, East, and West, there should be no differentiation based on where you are in the world; Fair Trade Enterprises should be everywhere!

What are the main ambitions for the coming years ?

To make **WFTO more visible** and having **more market access** for all our members. It is important that WFTO has access to a broader market than the traditional Fair Trade niche. Consumers worldwide are demanding more sustainable products and beyond that sustainable businesses; this is exactly what WFTO members are offering. WFTO members should be more active in the mainstream, but ethical, markets. To achieve this, we need to be visible, and again we make a strong call to all members: Put your FT enterprise label on all products. We can only do marketing if the WFTO verification is visible. This is common sense, and we highly depend on our membership for this; it is the responsibility of all members to make their products visible as produced by a Fair Trade Enterprise. This can be done by using the label on your products under your own brand, or by promoting the First Buyer Label.

WFTO will work hard to approach retailers to have WFTO products in their collection, partly via e-commerce, partly via the shops, supermarkets chains and boutiques. That will only have success if the products are seen and available.

Regarding the Food sector. Until now the majority of producers work in textiles, home decoration, fashion and jewelry etc. This situation gives a solid foundation for the organisation, but is subject to change. We see a growing number of food products where the food is processed by the producers of the commodity themselves or a nearby enterprise. This is, having system change in mind, a good evolution, as the producers of food should promote their own processing so that the added value created in the production chain stays within the region. Too often we still see the (colonial) situation where producers of (tropical) commodities export to the Global North industries, and where the main part of the profit still goes to the shareholders of those Northern companies.

WFTO should be made attractive and interesting for more food processing enterprises, in the hands of the producers, like cooperatives, to keep the added value at the spot. Not only producing for export, but, as it is food, also for domestic markets. This would help the food security in the country and region, while also creating greater well-being in rural areas if industries are built where the production is.

Talking about **Domestic Trade**, this would not only apply to food. Dealing with Climate Change, but also raising transport costs, it would be part of the system change to create more local and regional supply chains where possible. Also, within Fair Trade, it would be a good opportunity to tap into domestic markets, like many of our members are already successfully doing. South - South, but also North - North trade is part of the systemic approach of our organisation. Not only that, but it will give a huge opportunity for Fair Trade Enterprises to increase the network and gain huge visibility in all corners of the globe. Consuming Fair Trade products is not a Northern privilege, why should it be? Markets in India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Argentina, Brazil or China—just to name a few large countries — are larger than the European, US or Australian markets. Assuming that ethical consumers only exist in the Global North is quite Eurocentric, and I would even say colonial. As a World Fair Trade Organization we should cover all markets to increase the potential of sustainable producers, retailers and consumers.

This would also be totally in line with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development, where the world is not split up anymore in North and South. We are all in the same boat and all “developing countries”, advancing towards sustainability—in our case Fair and Green Trade business models—as mainstream and, in an ideal world, even mandatory.

Representing Fair Trade Enterprises in (inter)national decision making processes. This February, WFTO was represented for the first time as an accredited organisation at the 6th United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in Nairobi. Not as a NGO, but part of the Major Group of Business & Industry. As we are an association of businesses, it is really important that WFTO is present at these meetings—also on national levels— and to sit at the table when policies that have impact on trade and SMEs are made. The voice of Fair Trade Enterprises should be heard, and therefore WFTO should have the critical mass to be taken seriously at those negotiations tables.

We did already a lot, but there is still so much to do.

To end my presentation, I would like to reiterate the importance of making ourselves visible, heard and acknowledged. This work is the work of all members together, where the regional and global offices can support and facilitate. WFTO is you! A vibrant movement of Fair Trade Enterprises, all around the world, with the ultimate ambition to fulfil the Business Revolution and create a world where a new, sustainable and fair economy is the norm.

Thank you.

Leida Rijnhout