

The Rt. Hon. Sir Keir Starmer, MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

30th July 2025

Dear Prime Minister Starmer

The UK must support countries in the Global South against US President Trump's new tariffs.

In its recently published trade strategy, your Government stated that UK trade policy must do its bit to ensure that prosperity can be fairly shared, both at home and overseas. US tariff proposals for countries in the Global South fundamentally threaten that goal.

The 9th July was billed by Donald Trump as the day that tariffs, announced 3 months previously, would be implemented against any country that hadn't cut a trade deal with the US. He promised 90 deals in 90 days but only got two across the line. That means that countries in the Global South still face uncertainty and the threat of eye-watering tariffs.

Though the US has not yet implemented the worst of the proposed tariffs, President Trump has set a new deadline of 1st August and issued a set of letters to various countries reiterating his accusations of unfair behaviour against the US. He has also announced a different set of tariffs that will be applicable from that date.

[In a letter to Bangladesh](#), the US is reported to have invited the country to participate in "the extraordinary Economy of the United States, the Number One market in the World, by far" (capitalisation in the original). In order to avoid tariffs, the US states that Bangladeshi companies must "build or manufacture product [*sic*] within the United States."

The demands that the US is making on countries in the Global South are unrealistic and unfair. Export sectors play a huge role in these countries because they generate the foreign exchange needed to fund imports of essential goods such as staple foods, medicines, and energy. The US is the largest export market for a number of these countries, meaning that exorbitant tariffs threaten the very basis of their economies, which are already straining under debt, climate and cost of living crises. Costs are likely to be pushed down the supply chain, meaning that workers in sectors such as garments and agriculture, who already suffer from poverty wages, will bear the greatest burden. Lesotho has already declared a state of disaster because of the likely steep increase in unemployment.

We are deeply concerned that the US is undermining the well-established principle of Special and Differential Treatment for countries in the Global South, as established in World Trade Organisation agreements to which the UK is a party.

In the context of a global economic downturn and the impacts of climate change, even the uncertainty generated by changing deadlines and tariff levels is hugely damaging.

The UK Government must use its influence with the US to stress the importance of maintaining the principle of Special and Differential Treatment, to remove tariffs from the world's poorest countries, who represent a tiny proportion of US trade; and to reinstate preferential treatment for those countries.

The UK can also support countries in the Global South to weather the storm by taking faster and better unilateral measures, including expediting its review of Responsible Business Conduct. Slow, unwieldy and often inequitable trade agreements are not the solution.

As a matter of urgency, the UK must ensure that its own trade policies are well aligned with commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, including by:

- Introducing a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act;
- Reviewing its trade and investment provisions with Global South partners, including suspending Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAS) and cancelling ISDS with those countries.

Yours sincerely,

Tricia Sibbons, Director, ACTSA

Patrick Brown, Executive Director, Equal Right

Alice Oyaro, Chief Executive, Transform Trade

Tom Wills, Director, Trade Justice Movement

Rosie Downes, Head of Campaigns, Friends Of the Earth England and Wales

Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action

Nick Dearden, Director, Global Justice Now

Liz McKean, Interim Director, War on Want

Louise Davies, Chief Executive, Scottish Fair Trade

Dominique Muller, Director, Corporate Justice Coalition

Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy, CAFOD