Side Event

World Trade Organization

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Empowering Mountain and Landlocked Communities Through Trade Facilitation, Market Access, and Student-Centric Learning: Lessons from the Kyrgyz Republic and the State of Utah, United States

STATEMENT

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Your Excellencies, esteemed representatives of the World Trade Organization and fellow students.

It is an honor to join you today at the WTO, an institution that, for landlocked developing countries, represents not only rules, but routes: routes to markets and routes to participate in global value chains.

From September 2025 to June 2026, Mongolia served as coordinator of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, voicing the shared priorities of 32 nations across the WTO and the broader multilateral system.

Mongolia acceded to the WTO in 1997. For a country of 3.6 million people, landlocked between two of the world's largest economies, WTO membership achieved something geography could not. It anchored reforms, disciplined trade policy, and affirmed that location on a map does not determine standing in a rules-based system.

Yet structural constraints persist. More than 90% of Mongolia's exports remain commodity-based, and transit costs rank among the highest. These are daily frictions encountered by producers and entrepreneurs. This is why trade facilitation, effective transit cooperation, and market access remain development imperatives for LLDCs.

From Mongolia's perspective, openness only delivers when matched with inclusion, and rules only matter when they translate into real opportunity. This brings me to a central dimension of sustainable trade: the role of women. In Mongolia, women lead approximately two-thirds of SMEs and account for about 70% of the workforce. In an economy constrained by distance, they have driven diversification, strengthened resilience, and sustained employment.

Globally, women-led businesses face a 1.9 trillion USD credit gap and receive only 2% of venture capital. Closing this gap would generate major productivity gains and add up to 6 trillion dollars

to global GDP. For a landlocked economy where geography already imposes a cost premium on every export, this is not an equity policy appended to trade strategy. It is the trade strategy.

Mongolia has acted on that conviction. The ITC SheTrades Mongolia Hub supports hundreds of women entrepreneurs, while the WTO–ITC WEIDE Fund selected Mongolia as one of its first pilot countries, enabling women-led businesses to scale digitally and access export markets. Mongolia also successfully hosted the World Women Entrepreneurs Forum, convening partners across regions to strengthen the investment and regulatory environment.

Digitalisation has further reshaped this landscape. Mongolia has seen rapid growth in e-commerce adoption. Digital trade does not eliminate borders, but it lowers costs. It allows a producer in the Gobi desert to reach a consumer in Europe, turning connectivity into a functional substitute for physical proximity. Mongolia's Vision 2050 builds on this logic, shifting the economy toward value-based, sustainable, and knowledge-driven trade.

Mongolia's experience offers a simple proposition: geography defines constraints, not ambition. With the right combination of trade facilitation, digital connectivity, inclusive finance, and skills investment, landlocked countries can move from the margins toward the mainstream of global trade.

As for students, through research and policy engagement, we are not observers of this system but contributors to its evolution.

The steppe does not end at the horizon. It extends as far as collective commitment allows it to go.

Thank you.