



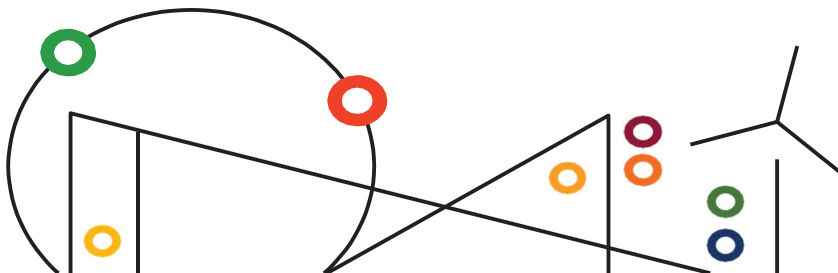
# Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones

## Report on the First GASEZ Annual Conference Montego Bay, Jamaica, 13 June 2022

### Opening

On 13 June 2022, the First Annual Conference of the Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones (GASEZ) was held at the Montego Bay Convention Centre in Jamaica. The conference attracted 750 participants, including the Prime Ministers of Jamaica and Curacao, government ministers, diplomats, business leaders, representatives of special economic zones (SEZs) and investment promotion agencies (IPAs), academics and members of the media.

The conference was opened by the two current Co-Chairs of GASEZ, Mr. James Zhan, Director of Investment and Enterprise of UNCTAD, and Mr. Samir Hamrouni, CEO of the World Free Zones Organization (World FZO). Both co-chairs stressed the importance of the conference, as it marks a key milestone in the workplan of GASEZ. Other high-level interventions at the opening included Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the United Nations General Assembly, who highlighted the importance of the alliance at a time when innovative partnerships are required to face threats that are putting at risk the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He was followed by Mr. Ricardo Trevino, Deputy Secretary-General of the World Customs Organization (WCO), who stressed the importance of good relations between SEZs and customs authorities and the need for collective policy advocacy through initiatives like GASEZ. In her opening remarks, Ms. Annette Mark, President of the Caribbean Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (CAIPA), proposed the idea of developing a cross-border, regional Caribbean free zone.



## Panel on Key Emerging Issues for Special Economic Zones

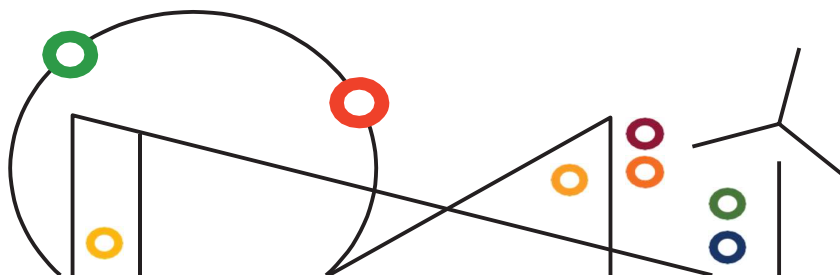
Mr. James Zhan opened the panel session and shared the latest findings of UNCTAD's World Investment Report which showed that, although foreign direct investment (FDI) recovered in 2021, the outlook remains fraught with uncertainty and marked by crises including in the three "Fs" (food, finance and fuel) as well as in the two "Hs" (humanitarian and health). This has important implications for FDI and SEZs, that also need to keep abreast of developments in the global investment policy landscape, such as the plans for a minimum tax on profits of multinationals. SEZs therefore need to adapt and modernize and focus more deliberately on incentives related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The panelists included Ms. Courtney Fingar, Editor-in-Chief of Investment Monitor, Ms. Ambar Ruiz, General Director of Free Zones in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Panama, Mr. John Tanui, President of the African Division of the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP) and CEO of the Konza Technopolis Development Authority of Kenya, Mr. Ainsley Brown, Senior Director, Regulation, Policy, Monitoring and Enforcement of the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) and Mr. Mohan Guruswamy, Chief Knowledge Officer, World FZO. They each gave their perspective on what the most pressing issues are currently for SEZs, highlighting the importance of strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the need for impact data, focusing on innovation by developing science and innovation parks within zones and ensuring re-investment in the zones. All of them stressed the role that GASEZ can play in sharing experiences and lessons learned between SEZs to allow them to adapt and the importance of engaging in joint policy advocacy.



## Workshop on SDG Model Zones

The workshop discussed the transition of SEZs to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) model zones in their strategic focus, design, governance and operations. The session was moderated by Paul Wessendorp, Chief of the Investment Promotion Section at UNCTAD. Ms. Diane Edwards, President of the Jamaica Development Corporation (JAMPRO) and a Board member of JSEZA, emphasized the importance of zones being better connected to the economy through linkages. She praised the employment created by the zones, particularly through Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) operations, which have helped bring down unemployment in Jamaica to an historical low rate. She also mentioned the importance of encouraging agriculture related businesses, including through SEZs. Following Ms. Edwards intervention, Mr. Gustavo Gonzales de Vega, President of the Free Trade Zones of the Americas (AZFA), gave an overview of activities by AZFA to help members become more sustainable with a focus on education, green energy and innovative infrastructure.



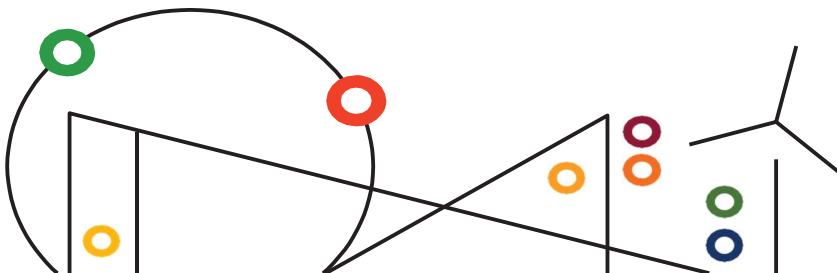
Two AZFA members followed with presentations on sustainable related activities in their zones. Mr. Carlos Wong, General Director of the Coyol Free Zone in Costa Rica, described the advancement of the zone into a major Life Science Hub, the focus given to education, the development of talent and decent work, and the attention devoted to the measurement of the zone's SDG impact. From the Colombian perspective, Mr. Juan Pablo Rivera, CEO of the Zona Franca Bogota, explained the long history of linkages between the economic zone and the city of Bogota, particularly with respect to waste management, recycling, reduction of the zone's carbon footprint and higher education. From the private sector, an intervention was made by Ms. Jacqueline Sutherland, President and CEO of Contax360 BPO Solutions. Ms. Sutherland's company has BPO operations in the SEZ in Montego Bay. She emphasized the importance of support to small and medium-sized enterprises who often provide the majority of decent jobs in areas with high unemployment. The session ended after an interesting question and answer session with the audience.



### **Workshop on Working Together to Facilitate Investment in the Recovery**

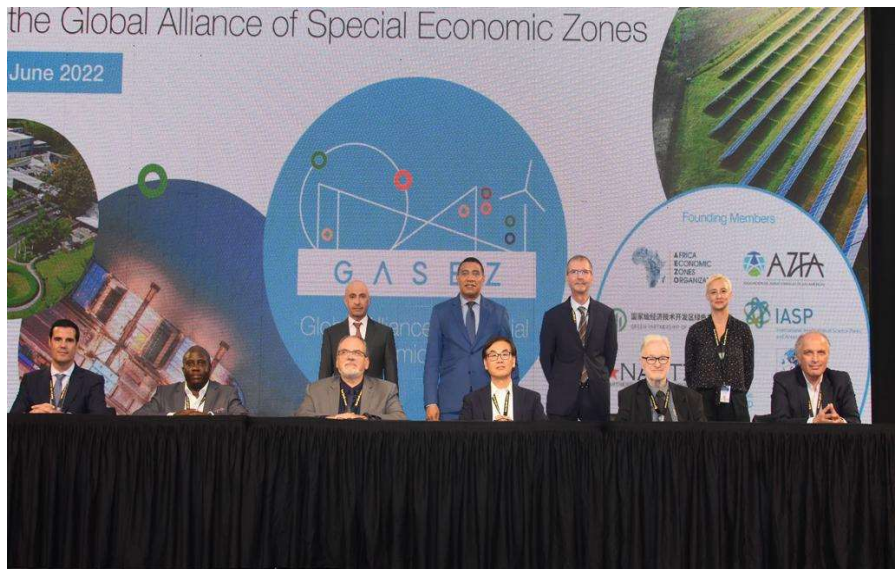
The workshop discussed how investment stakeholders can work together to pool resources and knowledge to channel investment towards sectors that are key to sustainable economic recovery. The session was moderated by Ms. Stephania Bonilla-Feret, Economic Affairs Officer at UNCTAD. Representatives of 3 founding members of GASEZ joined the panel, namely, Mr. Jeffrey Tafel, President of the National Association of Free Trade Zones (NAFTZ), United States of America, Ms. Maria Camila Moreno, Executive Director of AZFA and Mr. Juan Torrents, President of the World Free and Special Economic Zones Federation (FEMOZA). They emphasized the key role of SEZ associations in sharing experiences, learning and working together to address common challenges and opportunities for zones. They each shared their experiences developing digital platforms to strengthen communication between their members.

Ms. Kaye Anne Greenidge, CEO of Invest Barbados, provided the IPA perspective, stressing that IPAs need to work closely with SEZs. She provided the example of Barbados that is currently planning the first SEZ in the country and the IPA has been actively involved in the discussion from the onset. Ms. Imega Breese McNab, Executive Director of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica provided the Jamaican private sector view and focused on the importance of public-private dialogue in confronting common national challenges. She gave the example of the important role that the private sector had in supporting the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The panelists agreed that the same innovativeness of the private sector is necessary to come up with solutions to today's pressing challenges. They stressed the importance of regulation that supports the private sector and IPAs and SEZs focusing on investment facilitation.





**Signing Ceremony for the Establishment of GASEZ and Closing of the Conference**



Official signing ceremony for the Establishment of GASEZ. From top left: Mr. Mohammed Al Zarooni (World FZO), H.E. Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. Paul Wessendorp (UNCTAD) and Ms. Stephania Bonilla-Feret (UNCTAD)  
 From bottom left: Mr. Gustavo González de Vega (AZFA), Mr. John Tanui (IASP), Mr. Jeffrey Tafel (NAFTZ), Mr. James Zhan (UNCTAD), Mr. Juan Torrents (FEMOZA) and Mr. Samir Hamrouni (World FZO).

The closing ceremony of the GASEZ conference included statements by H.E. Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica and Mr. Mohammed Al-Zarooni, Chairman of the World FZO. They were followed by an information video of GASEZ featuring interventions from its 8 founding members. An official signing ceremony for the establishment of GASEZ followed. Representatives from AZFA, IASP, NAFTZ, UNCTAD, FEMOZA and the World FZO signed in person and representatives from the African Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) and the Green Partnership for Industrial Parks of China (GPIPC) signed remotely via video.

Mr. James Zhan of UNCTAD thanked the Jamaica Government and World FZO for hosting and facilitating the GASEZ Conference and he thanked all the participants for their active engagement in a very successful event.

