



11th World FZO World Congress

Zones: Gateways to Global Prosperity,
Trade, and Sustainable Innovation

- 📍 Hainan International Conference and Exhibition Center, Haikou, China
- 📅 10 - 12 October 2025

Welcome to the 11th edition of the World Free Zones

Organization Annual Congress, our flagship global gathering of free zone leaders, policymakers, innovators, and partners shaping the future of global trade and investment. This year, we are proud to host the Congress in partnership with the Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development.

As China's flagship Free Trade Port and a strategic node in the Belt and Road Initiative, Hainan represents a model of openness, reform, and global engagement. The Congress will spotlight and be inspired by this transformation, demonstrating how free zones can scale opportunity, strengthen economic connectivity, and power a new era of global cooperation.

Across three days of strategic dialogue, global networking, and leadership development, we'll spotlight the emerging role of zones as platforms for inclusive growth and cooperation. From China's Belt and Road vision to climate-conscious development, the Congress will set the tone for a new era of global free zones.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



INSIGHTFUL KEYNOTE
SPEECHES



INTERACTIVE
PANEL DISCUSSIONS



ADVANCED
WORKSHOPS



NETWORKING
OPPORTUNITIES



EXTENSIVE
EXHIBITION AREA



INVESTMENT
OPPORTUNITIES



KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND
RESEARCH



EXCLUSIVE
SOCIAL EVENTS

EVENT THEME

Zones: Gateways to Global Prosperity, Trade, and Sustainable Innovation

Free zones have long been catalysts for economic growth, trade connectivity, and sustainable development, evolving from simple trade enclaves into vibrant ecosystems where industries thrive, communities prosper, and nations address complex challenges. Their expansion, including through initiatives such as the Belt and Road, has further strengthened their role in fueling global economic vitality and fostering cross-border collaboration.

Today, as technological change, supply chain shifts, and climate imperatives reshape the world, zones are emerging as platforms that prioritize resilience, inclusivity, and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

This Congress provides a space for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and partnership-building, equipping stakeholders with strategies to address challenges, seize opportunities, and position zones as vital engines of global progress. Together, participants reaffirm their commitment to a future where prosperity, trade, and sustainability converge, ensuring zones remain at the forefront of transformative development.

AGENDA OVERVIEW 2025

Friday 10 October 2025

08:30-10:00	Welcome Remarks & Keynotes
10:00-10:30	Networking Coffee Break
10:30-11:30	Official Opening Ceremony
11:30-12:30	Leadership Program
11:30-12:30	Panel - Track Three
11:30-12:30	Workshop - Track Five
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:30	Leadership Program
13:30-14:30	Panel - Track One
13:30-14:30	Case Studies - Track Three
13:30-15:00	Ministerial Meeting
14:30-15:30	Panel - Track One
14:30-15:30	Interactive Session - Track Two
15:30-16:00	Networking Break
16:00-17:00	Panel - Track Five
16:00-17:00	Roundtable - Track Two
19:00-21:00	WELCOME RECEPTION

Saturday 11 October 2025

08:30-09:30	Opening Ceremony - Track Four
09:30-10:30	Panel - Track Four
10:30-10:40	Official Launching
10:40-11:00	Networking Break
11:00-12:00	Panel - TBC
11:00-12:00	Panel - TBC
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13:00-14:00	Entrepreneurial Meeting
13:00-14:00	Panel - TBC
13:00-14:00	Leadership Program
13:00-14:00	Roundtable - Track Five
14:00-15:00	Workshop - Track One
14:00-15:00	BRICS Meeting
15:00-15:30	Networking Break
15:30-16:30	Leadership Program
15:30-16:30	Panel - Track Two
15:30-16:30	Workshop - Track One
16:30-18:30	World FZO BoD Meeting
20:00-23:00	Gala Dinner

Sunday 12 October 2025

09:00-12:00	China Zone International Forum
09:00-09:30	Opening Ceremony
9:30-10:30	Keynote speeches
10:30-10:45	Networking Break
10:45-12:00	Round Table Forum
09:00-10:00	Leadership Program
09:00-10:00	Workshop - Track Six
09:00-10:00	Workshop - Track Six
10:00-11:00	Panel - Track Six
10:00-11:00	Panel - Track Six
11:00-11:30	Networking Break
11:00-12:10	Panel - Track Six
11:30-12:10	Leadership Closing Ceremony
12:30-13:00	World Congress Closing Ceremony
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-16:00	World FZO General Assembly
14:00-15:30	World FZO Sustainable Zones - TBC
15:30-17:00	World FZO Sustainable Zones - TBC

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OPENING CEREMONY SPEAKERS

Opening Address

Dr. Mohammed Al Zarooni, Chairman, World Free Zones Organization, United Arab Emirates

Keynote Speakers

Aiqing Fang, President, China International Investment Promotion Council, China

Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General, International Road Union, Switzerland

Rie Vejs-Kjeldgaard, Director, Department of Sustainable Enterprises, Productivity and Just Transition, ILO, Switzerland.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Samir Hamrouni, CEO, World Free Zones Organization, United Arab Emirates



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TRACKS

Track One - Economic Prosperity through Zones

This track explores how free zones are becoming powerful engines of inclusive economic growth and structural transformation in an evolving global economy. Zones are no longer just enclaves of trade and investment; they are strategic platforms that generate employment opportunities, foster SME growth, facilitate sustainable tourism, and create meaningful linkages with local economies. By serving as incubators for entrepreneurship, skills development, and knowledge transfer, zones can accelerate industrial diversification and strengthen regional value chains.

The sessions under this track will highlight successful zone models that deliver measurable socioeconomic outcomes, including job creation, innovation-driven industries, and sustainable community development. Participants will also examine practical tools and policy frameworks that enhance competitiveness, attract quality investment, and ensure that the benefits of zones extend beyond their perimeters. Ultimately, this track will demonstrate how zones, when strategically designed and effectively managed, can be catalysts for shared prosperity and long-term economic resilience.

Track One - Panel - Zones as catalysts for local and Regional Growth

Friday 10 October 13:30- 14:30

This panel examines how free zones serve as engines of inclusive development by driving employment, integrating SMEs into global supply chains, and strengthening regional value chains. Drawing on best practices, panelists will highlight how zones can extend prosperity beyond their perimeters, supporting communities and fostering resilience. Key questions include: How can zones deepen linkages with local economies to create lasting benefits? What innovative strategies best support SME participation and scaling within zones? In what ways can regional cooperation among zones unlock shared prosperity and competitiveness across borders?

Speakers:

Moderator: Courtney Fingar, Founder & Principal, Fingar Direct Investment, UK
Ahmed Bennis, Secretary General, Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO), Morocco
Hossam Heiba, CEO, General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI), Egypt
Preston Mendenhall, Group COO, Country Head, Rendeavour, Kenya
Alok V. Chaturvedi, Director General, Export Promotion Council for EOUs & SEZs (EPCES), India.

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Track One - Panel - WTC Ecosystem and Free Zones: Catalysts for Global Trade and Investment

Friday 10 October 14:30- 15:30

The World Trade Centers Association (WTCA) network spans more than 90 countries, connecting businesses, investors, and policymakers through a global ecosystem of trade facilitation. This panel explores how WTCs and free zones can jointly act as catalysts for cross-border commerce, FDI attraction, and supply chain integration. Drawing on case studies from both mature and emerging markets, panelists will examine how the WTC-Free Zone partnership model can amplify international visibility, streamline market entry, and create synergistic value propositions for tenants and investors. The discussion will also highlight opportunities to integrate sustainability, innovation hubs, and digital trade platforms into this ecosystem, positioning zones as dynamic trade accelerators in the post-pandemic global economy.

Speakers

Moderator: Martin Ibarra, President, Araújo Ibarra International Business Consultants, Colombia

Scott Wang, Vice President, World Trade Centers Association, Asia Pacific, USA

Mingxing Li, Chairman, WTC Haikou, China

Miguel Lama Rodriguez, President, Corporación Zona Franca Santiago, Dominican Republic

Track One - Workshop - World Tourism Economic Free Zones

Saturday 11 October 2025 14:00-15:00

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, and free zones can be a powerful catalyst for unlocking tourism-related investment. This interactive workshop explores how zones can be structured to attract large-scale hospitality, leisure, and entertainment projects while ensuring sustainability, community integration, and year-round economic benefits. Participants will examine successful tourism zone models from integrated resorts to cruise terminals and cultural heritage districts—and discuss strategies for attracting anchor investors, leveraging PPP models, and aligning with national tourism strategies.

Speakers:

Moderator: Martin Ibarra, President, Araújo Ibarra International Business Consultants, Colombia

Rizal Edwin Manansang, Secretary General, National Council for Special Economic Zones, Indonesia.

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Track One - Workshop - Metrics that Matter. How Zones Measure and Communicate Impact

Saturday 11 October 2025 15:30-16:30

In today's complex economic environment, zones must go beyond traditional indicators to prove their relevance and value. Job creation alone is no longer sufficient to measure success. Stakeholders—from governments under mounting sovereign debt pressures to investors and local communities—expect zones to demonstrate broader contributions to prosperity. This workshop will explore the fundamental questions: What does success look like? How do you measure success? Participants will examine how zones can balance the need for fiscal incentive packages with governments' competing obligations to fund essential services such as health and education. The discussion will highlight innovative frameworks and practical tools for measuring outcomes like SME integration, skills development, sustainability, and regional value chain growth. By focusing on economic development metrics beyond employment, zones can build stronger public trust, secure investor confidence, and communicate their true impact as catalysts for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Speakers

Moderator: Courtney Fingar, Founder & Principal, Fingar Direct Investment, UK

Alex Irwing-Hunt, Reporter, fDi Intelligence, UK

Richard Bolwijn, Head, Investment Research Branch, Division on Investment and Enterprise, UNCTAD, Switzerland

Pan Li, Vice Chairman, China National Association of FTZ & EPZ, China



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Track Two: Stakeholders

Zones thrive when they create inclusive ecosystems that empower all economic actors to participate and prosper. This track focuses on how zones can design and implement strategies that ensure benefits extend to a wide range of stakeholders, from multinational investors to SMEs, women entrepreneurs, youth, and local communities. By fostering supplier development programs, facilitating fair and transparent access to incentives, and tailoring services to diverse business needs, zones can become platforms for equity and opportunity.

Sessions will showcase best practices in stakeholder engagement, highlighting how zones can strengthen social and economic linkages, build resilient local economies, and nurture innovation through inclusive participation. Special emphasis will be placed on gender-aware leadership initiatives, skills development, and capacity-building frameworks that empower underrepresented groups. Ultimately, this track demonstrates that zones achieve their highest potential not when they serve the few, but when they create prosperity that is widely shared.

Track Two - Interactive Session - Women in Zone Leadership: Breaking Barriers

Friday 10 October 14:30-15:30

This roundtable brings together leaders from across the free zone ecosystem to share their leadership journeys and strategies for increasing women's representation at every level from governance and policymaking to SME ownership and daily operations. Panelists will explore both challenges and opportunities in building more inclusive and gender-aware zone ecosystems. Discussion will highlight actionable strategies that create pathways for women to lead, innovate, and thrive within zones. Key questions include: What structural changes are needed to advance women's leadership in zones? How can zones design policies and incentives that support female entrepreneurs? What role does mentorship play in sustaining women's participation and success?

Speakers

Moderator: Angelica Peña, Executive Director, Chamber of Free Trade Zone Users, Colombia

Blanca Sorigué, Managing Director, Consorci de la Zona Franca de Barcelona, Spain

Ms. Priscilla Lim, CEO, Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ), Malaysia

Stephanie Bonilla-Feret, Chief, Office of the Director, Division on Investment and Enterprise, UNCTAD, Switzerland

Kelli-Dawn Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA), Jamaica

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Track Two - Roundtable- Empowering SMEs in Zone Ecosystems

Friday 10 October 16:00- 17:00

Free zones are uniquely positioned to act as gateways for SMEs, enabling them to move beyond local markets and participate meaningfully in global value chains. By connecting smaller firms to multinational anchor companies, zones can foster knowledge transfer, innovation, and competitiveness. This roundtable will highlight practical approaches—from targeted supplier development programs and cluster-based co-location strategies to digital platforms—that strengthen SME integration into global networks. Key questions include: What policy frameworks best enable SMEs to thrive within zone ecosystems that ensure long-term competitiveness? How can zones build effective linkages between SMEs and multinational investors? What strategies ensure SMEs capture more value within supply chains? How can zones measure and communicate the broader impact of SME integration?

Speakers

Dr. Hashim Hussein, Head, Investment and Technology Promotion Office, Bahrain
Alok V Chaturvedi, DG, Export Promotion Council for EOUs & SEZs (EPCES), India
Badr Buhanad, DG, Dubai Silicon Oasis, UAE

Track Two - Panel - Voices from the ground: Tenant Perspectives on Zone Services.

Saturday 11 October 2025 15:30-16:30

Zones are only as effective as the experiences of the businesses operating within them. This panel gives the floor to tenants—from multinational corporations to local SMEs—who will share first-hand perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of doing business in zones. Panelists will discuss what services and regulatory frameworks support their growth, what barriers they encounter, and how zones can better align offerings with investor and tenant needs. By examining issues such as infrastructure quality, administrative efficiency, talent availability, and access to suppliers, this session will provide valuable insights into the realities on the ground. Ultimately, the discussion aims to identify practical solutions that enhance tenant satisfaction, foster competitiveness, and build stronger zone ecosystems. Key questions include: What zone services and policies have most effectively supported business growth? How can zones better integrate SMEs into supply chains and global networks? What innovative approaches can enhance tenant satisfaction and long-term competitiveness?

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Track Three: Free Trade Port- Focus on China

This track examines the pivotal role of China's Free Trade Ports—particularly Hainan—as exemplary models for trade liberalization, regulatory innovation, and seamless integration with global supply chains. By exploring how these ports have successfully reduced barriers, streamlined operations, and fostered international collaboration, participants will gain insights into strategies that can enhance zone competitiveness worldwide. Sessions will feature comparative case studies, highlighting lessons learned from both successes and challenges, and will explore how such models can inform policy and operational frameworks in other regions.

Track Three - Panel - China's Free Trade Ports: Reform, Growth and Global Integration

Friday 10 October 11:30 -12:30

This panel explores the architecture of China's Free Trade Ports, focusing on policy reform, service liberalization, and pilot programs that enable global competitiveness. Speakers will discuss implications for investment flows, customs reform, and regional connectivity.

This panel examines the architecture and strategic design of China's Free Trade Ports, with a focus on policy reform, service liberalization, and pilot initiatives that enhance global competitiveness. Speakers will explore how these ports have streamlined customs processes, attracted investment, and strengthened integration into regional and global supply chains. The discussion will highlight lessons that other zones can adapt to boost efficiency, trade facilitation, and cross-border collaboration. Panelists will draw on their expertise to assess the broader implications of these reforms for investors, policymakers, and regional development. Key questions include: What regulatory innovations have most effectively driven growth in China's Free Trade Ports? How can lessons from Hainan inform global zone strategies? In what ways can these ports enhance regional and global supply chain integration?

Speakers

Keynote Speaker: Prof. Chi Fulin, President, China Institute Reform & Development, China

Juan A. Duarte Galán, Executive President LATAM, American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), USA

John Lucy, Founder & CEO, JL International, former CEO, Freeport of Liverpool, United Kingdom

Jochen Knecht, CEO, IFZA, UAE

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Track Three - Case Studies- Transformative Success Stories: Free Trade Ports Driving local and Global Growth

Friday 10 13:30- 14:30

This session showcases inspiring examples of Free Trade Ports across Asia and Africa that have successfully transformed their regions through innovative approaches. Speakers will highlight initiatives in logistics modernization, streamlined customs procedures, and the development of innovation hubs that foster entrepreneurship and attract investment. Emphasis will be placed on how these ports have strengthened local economies while integrating effectively into global supply chains.

Speakers:

John Lucy, Founder & CEO, JL International, United Kingdom



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Track Four: Global Exchange Pathways Advancing Openness and Sustainable Integration

This track explores how zones are redefining the flow of goods, services, and ideas in a rapidly evolving global landscape. As traditional trade models face disruption and regional integration accelerates, zones are emerging as flexible, strategic platforms that enable seamless economic exchange. Sessions will examine the shifting dynamics of global trade, highlighting how connectivity—both physical and digital—drives growth, innovation, and competitiveness. Participants will explore the infrastructure, policies, and partnerships that allow zones to function as modern gateways to prosperity, fostering cross-border collaboration while supporting sustainability and resilience. High-level interviews, interactive workshops, and spirited debates will provide participants with practical insights into designing zones that respond to global market trends, supply chain transformations, and evolving investor expectations. The track emphasizes the importance of aligning local and global strategies, demonstrating how zones can balance openness with sustainable practices. Ultimately, it showcases the future-facing role of zones in building inclusive, adaptive, and forward-looking trade ecosystems that strengthen regional integration, support economic diversification, and deliver lasting value to communities and global partners alike.

Track Four - Opening Ceremony - Pathways to Prosperity: Zones and the Future of Trade"

Saturday 11 08:30-09:30

Welcome Address

Dr. Mohammed Al Zarooni, Chairman, World Free Zones Organization, UAE

Keynote Speech: "The Evolving Architecture of Global Trade: What Role for Zones?"

Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General, International Road Union, Switzerland

Zhang Jun, Secretary-General, Boao Forum for Asia, China

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Track Four - Panel – Redefining Connectivity in a Fragmented World: Future of Trade & Logistics

Saturday 11 October 9:30-10:30

Global trade is at a crossroads, shaped by shifting supply chains, regional fragmentation, and the urgent need for sustainability. This panel explores how innovations in logistics and trade facilitation are redefining connectivity and enabling zones to remain competitive in a rapidly changing landscape. Featuring leading voices from logistics providers, infrastructure agencies, and trade policymakers, the discussion will examine cutting-edge solutions such as digitized trade corridors, green and sustainable logistics systems, and multimodal infrastructure upgrades that connect markets more efficiently. Panelists will share practical experiences and strategic insights, offering a forward-looking view of how logistics can drive inclusive growth and resilience. Key questions include: How can digitization of trade corridors streamline supply chains and reduce bottlenecks? What sustainable logistics practices can zones adopt to balance efficiency with environmental responsibility? How can multimodal infrastructure upgrades strengthen regional integration and global connectivity in fragmented trade environments?

Speakers:

Moderator: James Zhan, Chairman of the Executive Board, World Investment Conference (WAIPA), Switzerland

Holger Bingmann, Deputy Secretary General, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), France.

Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General, International Road Union, Switzerland

Sean Doherty, Head, International Trade and Investment; Member of the Executive Committee, World Economic Forum, Switzerland

Track Four - Panel - Tax and Free Zones: Challenges and Opportunities

Saturday 11 October 11:00-12:00

The OECD's Global Minimum Tax (GMT) is transforming how free zones compete for investment, reducing the scope for ultra-low or zero corporate tax regimes. Zones must now pivot towards a broader package of incentives ranging from financial incentives to advanced infrastructure and innovation support to streamlined regulatory frameworks, sustainability credentials, and deep talent pool to remain globally competitive. The discussion will also address the strategic implications of the United States withdrawing from the GMT agreement, assessing how this could reshape the playing field and influence investor decisions.

Adding to these challenges is a major shift in foreign trade procedures for cross-border e-commerce. Historically built around the de minimis framework, these processes have been significantly tightened—first by the European Union and more recently by the United States—subjecting small packages to higher taxes and more complex customs clearance. This change demands a redesign of cross-border e-commerce logistics, compliance, and taxation. The panel will explore proposed new procedures and examine how free zones can seize the opportunity to attract production, fulfilment, and value-added processing operations that align with evolving tariff and customs regimes.

Speakers

Dr. Henry Loewendahl, CEO, Wavteq Group, Turkey

Martin Ibarra, Martin Dovat, Cesare Zingone

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Track Four - Panel - Zones as Regional Trade Gateways: Challenges and Opportunities

Saturday 11 October 11:00-12:00

Zones are increasingly positioned as gateways for regional trade, serving as platforms to build economic corridors, facilitate interoperability, and strengthen cross-border cooperation. This panel brings together experiences from Asia, MENA, and Africa to examine how zones can overcome fragmentation and create pathways for shared prosperity. Speakers will highlight successes and challenges in harmonizing regulations, upgrading infrastructure, and designing policies that link zones into wider regional value chains. By sharing comparative lessons, the discussion will explore practical solutions to unlock the full potential of zones in driving regional integration. Key questions include: What regulatory harmonization is needed to strengthen interoperability? How can zones balance local development with regional ambitions? What role do public-private partnerships play in creating sustainable trade corridors?

Speakers

Julio Rodriguez, Executive Director, AZFA, Colombia

Ahmed Bennis, Secretary General, Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO), Morocco

Helson Braga, President, ABRAZPE, Brazil

Khabib Abdullaev, CEO, Navoi Free Economic Zone, Uzbekistan

Track Four - Panel – Tariffs and Free Zones: Challenges and Opportunities

Saturday 11 October 13:00-14:00

Tariff policy remains one of the most powerful levers shaping global trade flows and free zones sit at the intersection of its risks and opportunities. This panel will explore how evolving tariff regimes, trade disputes, and regional trade agreements impact the competitiveness of zones. While rising tariffs can disrupt supply chains and investment flows, they can also position free zones as strategic safe harbors, offering duty-free processing, tariff engineering, and re-export advantages. Panelists will discuss how zones can adapt to volatile trade environments, work with customs authorities to implement flexible solutions, and leverage tariff benefits to attract new industries and markets.

Speakers:

Dr. Henry Loewendahl, CEO, Wavteq Group (Turkey/UAE)

Martin Ibarra, Martin Dovat, Cesare Zingone

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Track Five: Digital

In an era of rapid technological transformation, zones must evolve into digitally enabled ecosystems that drive efficiency, innovation, and sustainability. This track explores how advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, and robust cybersecurity frameworks are reshaping the role of zones as investment and trade platforms. By embedding digital tools into core operations, zones can streamline customs processes, enhance supply chain visibility, and deliver faster, more secure services to businesses and investors. Sessions will highlight how digitalization is not only a driver of competitiveness but also a critical enabler of ESG-aligned innovation. From smart infrastructure and predictive analytics to green technologies and resource optimization, digital solutions allow zones to meet the demands of a fast-changing global economy while advancing sustainability goals. Participants will engage with case studies and expert insights that showcase how zones are leveraging digital frameworks to create resilient, future-ready ecosystems. Ultimately, this track underscores that zones which embrace digital transformation are best positioned to thrive as gateways of global prosperity, enabling seamless connectivity, operational excellence, and inclusive, sustainable growth.

Track Five - Workshop - Digital Trade Facilitation: Streamlining Compliance and Customs

Friday 10 October 11:30-12:30

In today's fast-moving global economy, efficient and transparent trade facilitation is critical to competitiveness. This workshop explores how zones can leverage digital transformation to modernize customs systems, reduce bottlenecks, and strengthen compliance. The session will highlight paperless trade solutions, the adoption of blockchain for secure and transparent transactions, and the use of digital twins to simulate and optimize supply chain processes in real time. Participants will gain practical insights into how these tools improve risk management, reduce costs, and create more resilient trade environments. Emphasis will also be placed on interoperability how digital trade systems can connect seamlessly across borders to support regional and global integration. By examining best practices and pilot initiatives, the workshop will provide policymakers, customs authorities, and zone operators with actionable strategies to streamline operations, enhance trust, and position zones as leaders in next-generation trade facilitation.

Speakers

Pamela Mar, Managing Director, ICC Digital Standards Initiative (DSI), Singapore

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Track Five - Panel - Smart Zones: Leveraging AI, IoT, and Data for Operational Excellence

Friday 10 October 16:00 -17:00

As zones evolve into digitally enabled ecosystems, the ability to harness data and advanced technologies is becoming central to operational excellence. This panel brings together zone operators and technology partners to showcase practical applications of artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and predictive analytics in driving efficiency, resilience, and sustainability. From IoT-enabled visibility across supply chains to AI-powered forecasting for investment flows, and ESG dashboards that measure and report impact in real time, panelists will explore how smart technologies transform day-to-day management of zones. The session emphasizes how digital tools can reduce costs, improve compliance, and enhance investor confidence while advancing ESG commitments. Key questions include: How can AI and predictive analytics improve decision-making and operational resilience in zones? What role does IoT play in enhancing visibility and integration across complex supply chains? How can ESG dashboards help zones measure, manage, and communicate their sustainability performance effectively?

Speakers

Dr. Jan Michael Mrosik, Former CEO of Knorr-Bremse Siemens Digital Factory, Siemens Energy Management, Germany
Martin Dovat, CEO and Director, Zonamerica, Colombia

Track Five - Roundtable - Cybersecurity in Free Zones: Balancing Access and Protection

Saturday 11 October 2025 13:00-14:00

As free zones embrace digital transformation, cybersecurity has become a critical pillar of resilience and trust. This roundtable will explore strategies to safeguard digital infrastructure while preserving the openness and interconnectivity that zones require to thrive as global trade and investment platforms. Participants will discuss how to balance enabling seamless access for tenants, investors, and customs authorities with the need to mitigate rising risks such as data breaches, cyberattacks, and supply chain vulnerabilities. The session will highlight practical approaches, including the development of cybersecurity frameworks, public-private partnerships for digital security, and investment in skills and awareness programs for operators and tenants. Panelists will share best practices on integrating security into digital platforms such as blockchain, AI-driven monitoring, and IoT-enabled infrastructure. Ultimately, the roundtable will examine how zones can strengthen digital trust, ensure continuity of services, and position themselves as secure, future-ready gateways for global trade and connectivity.

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WORLD FZO CERTIFICATIONS

World FZO Sustainable Zones – Certifying the Future: Sustainable Industrial Parks as Engines of Green Growth

Sunday 12 October 15:30-17:00

Economic zones are the powerhouses of the global economy, but their future hinges on a fundamental shift towards sustainability. How do we transform these zones from centers of production into models of efficiency, resilience, and environmental stewardship? This session unveils a critical tool for this transformation: the Sustainable Zones Certification Program, jointly provided by WFZO and MVGX. Join us to explore how a robust certification framework is not just an accolade, but a strategic blueprint for future-proofing industrial operations. The Sustainable Industrial Park Standard, aligned with ISO 37101, provides a comprehensive framework for Free Zones to implement and maintain sustainable development practices. In this session, we will demonstrate that the dual certification (ISO 37101 & PAS IP 8848) ensures your Free Zone is equipped to:

- Global Recognition: Demonstrate your commitment to sustainability with internationally recognized certifications.
- Operational Excellence: Improve economic, social, environmental, and governance outcomes.
- Competitive Edge: Attract eco-conscious investors and tenants.
- Futureproofing: Prepare for evolving regulatory and market demands.

Go beyond theory with insights from real-world case studies and learn how certification is becoming the new benchmark for industrial excellence. Discover how to turn your industrial park into a true engine for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Speakers

Moderator: Bo Bai, President, MVGX (Singapore)

Shaikh Dr. Ali Masoud Ali Al Sunaidy

Kelli-Dawn Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA), Jamaica

World FZO Sustainable Zones - The Green Powerhouse: Fueling Net-Zero Zones with Renewable Energy

Sunday 12 October 14:00-15:30

The race to net-zero is reshaping global industry, and special economic zones are at the forefront of this transformation. Decarbonization is no longer a peripheral goal but the central strategy for securing a competitive advantage, attracting trillions in sustainable finance, and ensuring long-term resilience. This dynamic combined session provides a complete blueprint for zones to become leaders in the low-carbon economy. We begin with a practical workshop that maps the journey to net-zero, demonstrating how to integrate energy-efficient infrastructure, smart grids, and circular economy principles—turning waste into resources and fostering industrial symbiosis. The conversation then accelerates into a focused panel discussion on the most critical lever for decarbonization: renewable energy. Discover how solar, wind, and green hydrogen projects are no longer just about reducing emissions but are powerful economic drivers that lower operational costs, enhance energy security, and create entirely new value chains and green jobs. Through real-world case studies and expert insights, this session will equip zone operators, policymakers, and investors with actionable strategies to:

- Develop an integrated net-zero roadmap that combines infrastructure upgrades with circular economy models.
- Unlock the economic potential of renewable energy, from financing and regulatory frameworks to public-private partnerships.
- Align decarbonization projects with climate finance and ESG criteria to secure necessary investment.
- Build a resilient, profitable, and attractive zone that thrives in the new global green economy.

Speakers

Song Yuyan, Secretary-General, GPIPC, China

Khabib Abdullaev, CEO, Navoi Free Economic Zone, Uzbekistan

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Track Six - Workshop - Addressing Common Challenges: From Compliances to Competitiveness

Sunday 12 October 2025, 09:00-10:00

This interactive workshop invites participants to explore common structural and operational challenges faced by zones worldwide. Topics include customs automation, ESG data tracking, labor compliance, and multi-agency coordination critical areas that can affect efficiency, investor confidence, and overall competitiveness. Participants will engage in collaborative exercises to identify bottlenecks and share experiences, highlighting lessons learned from diverse regional and operational contexts. The session emphasizes co-creating practical solutions, including toolkits, frameworks, and process improvements that can be adapted and implemented across different countries and zones. By the end of the workshop, participants will gain actionable strategies to enhance operational efficiency, strengthen compliance, and build more resilient, globally competitive zone ecosystems, while fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address systemic challenges collectively.

Speakers

Dr. Manuel Pedro, Chairman, Zona Economica Especial (ZEE), Angola
Dr. James Zhan, Chair WAIPA & Co-Chair the Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones
Dr. Olufemi Ogunyemi, Managing Director, Nigeria Export Processing Zone Authority (NEPZA), Nigeria.

Track Six - Workshop - Collaborative Leadership: Building Alliances Across Borders

Sunday 12 October 2025 09:00-10:00

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, zones cannot operate in isolation. This workshop focuses on how zone leaders can build cross-border alliances and peer learning networks to accelerate reforms, share best practices, and drive inclusive growth. Participants will explore leadership models that foster trust, alignment, and effective collaboration among zones, governments, and private investors. The session will highlight strategies for creating frameworks that enable resource sharing, coordinated policy development, and joint investment initiatives. Emphasis will be placed on cultivating a culture of open communication, mutual accountability, and innovation-driven collaboration that strengthens regional and global networks. Participants will engage in interactive exercises, case studies, and scenario planning to identify practical approaches for overcoming barriers to cooperation. By the end of the workshop, leaders will be equipped with actionable tools to forge lasting partnerships, enhance governance, and accelerate the transformation of zones into globally integrated, high-performing ecosystems.

Speakers:

Moderator: Courtney Fingar, Founder & Principal, Fingar Direct Investment, UK
Dr. Hashim Hussein, Head, Investment and Technology Promotion Office, Bahrain
James Zhan, Chairman of the Executive Board, World Investment Conference (WAIPA), Switzerland
Cesare Zingone, CEO, Zeta Holdings, Costa Rica
Ahmed Bennis, CEO, TangerMed, Morocco.
Blanca Sorigue, DG, Consorci Zona Franca Barcelona, Spain

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

Track Six - Panel - Zones as Investment Gateways; Trends and Risks

Sunday 12 October 2025 10:00-11:00

Free zones have become critical gateways for channeling global investment into high-growth sectors, but the landscape is evolving rapidly. This panel will explore the megatrends reshaping zone development, from shifting capital flows and new sources of FDI, to the growing influence of ESG standards and impact investing. We will examine how investors are recalibrating their due diligence to include climate resilience, governance, and social value and what this means for structuring competitive, future-proof projects within zones. The session will also address emerging risks, including geopolitical uncertainty, regulatory tightening, and market volatility, and outline strategies for mitigating these risks while seizing opportunities in fast-expanding industries. With perspectives from both policymakers and investment practitioners, this discussion will provide free zone leaders with actionable insights on positioning their zones as secure, attractive, and sustainable investment platforms.

Speakers

Moderator: Alex Irwing-Hunt, Reporter, fDi Intelligence, UK

Srikanth Badiga, Chairman, Export Promotion Council for EOUs and SEZs (EPCES), India

Cesare Zingone, CEO, Zeta Holding, Costa Rica

Dr. Olufemi Ogunyemi, Managing Director, Nigeria Export Processing Zone Authority (NEPZA), Nigeria.

Track Six - Workshop - Legacy Free Zones: Designing for 100 Years of Impact

Sunday 12 October 2025 10:00-11:00

Most free zones are designed for short-term policy cycles, quick investor wins, or the lifespan of specific projects. But what if a zone was envisioned to thrive for a century or more? Legacy Free Zones are visionary ecosystems built not merely to attract tenants, but to shape nations, develop human capital, and remain globally relevant for generations. This session will examine the principles, governance models, and infrastructure strategies that allow zones to outlast political cycles, economic shifts, and technological revolutions. Drawing on real-world examples, panellists will explore how future-proof design, community integration, and institutional discipline can create zones that are engines of prosperity for decades to come.

Speaker

Cesare Zingone – Founder, Zeta Free Zone, Costa Rica

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

Track Six - Panel - How Free Zones are Driving the Businesses of the Future

Sunday 12 October 2025 11:00-12:10

The global economy is shifting rapidly, creating unprecedented opportunities for forward-looking free zones to drive sustainable growth. This session will explore how zones are aligning with leading international partners to capture emerging industries of the future. We will examine collaborations with the International Energy Agency (IEA) to accelerate renewable adoption and create hydrogen-focused industrial ecosystems; partnerships with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to develop global food hubs that reduce production and transport costs; joint initiatives with UN Tourism to design tourism-driven zones that blend cultural heritage with sustainable visitor economies; and investments in cutting-edge digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence to boost efficiency, optimize operations, and reduce costs. By embracing these high-impact sectors and working with world-class institutions, free zones can position themselves as innovation platforms and magnets for the next wave of global investment.

Speakers

Martin Ibarra, President, Araújo Ibarra International Business Consultants, Colombia

Dr. Henry Loewendahl, CEO, Wavteq Group (Turkey/UAE)

Dr. Hashim Hussein, Head, Investment and Technology Promotion Office, Bahrain



Cesare Zingone
CEO Zeta Group
Costa Rica

Steven Spence Marshall
Former Premier of South Australia
Australia

Andrea Céspedes Marín
Director Special Regimes, Procomer
Costa Rica

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Zones as Gateways to Profitability, Competitiveness & Sustainable Innovation

Program Overview

Free zones are no longer just policy tools or industrial enclaves, they are strategic gateways to global prosperity. As the world redefines trade, innovation, and sustainability, free zones are uniquely positioned to lead. This three-day Executive Leadership Program equips developers, operators, and policymakers with cutting-edge strategies to enhance profitability, foster competitiveness, and align with sustainable, innovation-driven economic models.

Learning Objectives

- Unlock the financial drivers of profitability in next-generation free zones.
- Design mixed-use ecosystems that enable economic, environmental, and social value.
- Leverage smart infrastructure and sustainability for global competitiveness.
- Optimize connectivity and supply chain resilience as trade corridors evolve.
- Position zones as magnets for investment through specialization and ecosystem design.

Speakers

Cesare Zingone – Founder, Zeta Free Zone, Costa Rica

John Lucy, Founder & CEO, JL International, United Kingdom

Martin Dovat, CEO and Director, Zonamerica, Colombia

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Session 1: Free Zones as Gateways to Prosperity

Friday 10 October 2025 11:30-12:30:

Reframing Zones as Platforms for Investment, Trade, and Innovation

- From tax benefits to transformative impact: the evolving mission of free zones
- Driving profitability: cap rates, NOI optimization, and scalable revenue models
- Strategic site and market positioning: land value, infrastructure, and rental benchmarks
- The rise of PPPs: unlocking public and private value in long-term development

Session 2: Unlocking Value through Mixed-Use Ecosystems

Friday 10 October 2025 13:30-14:30

Designing Zones that Support Economic and Social Sustainability

- Multi-use masterplans: combining industrial, commercial, and residential uses
- Lifestyle integration: retail, wellness, and services that enhance workforce retention
- Co-working, flex-industrial, and shared innovation spaces: enabling adaptability
- Case spotlight: Costa Rica's emergence as a mixed-use zone ecosystem

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Session 3: Future-Ready Zones: Smart, Green & Globally Competitive

Saturday 11 October 2025 13:00-14:00

Accelerating Innovation through Technology and Sustainability

- Digital transformation: IoT, automation, and AI in zone operations
- Renewable energy and green infrastructure for long-term cost advantage
- ESG as a value driver: attracting responsible global capital
- Case spotlight: Masdar City and the convergence of tech, green finance, and trade

Session 4: Infrastructure & Supply Chain Agility

Saturday 11 October 2025 15:30-16:30

Enhancing Connectivity, Resilience & Access to Global Markets

- Smart logistics, intermodal transport, and mobility infrastructure
- Supply chain optimization by design: speed, flexibility, and cost efficiency
- Zone location strategy in an era of nearshoring and friend-shoring
- The new imperative: adaptable leasing models for uncertain futures

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Session 5: Specialization & Strategic Identity for Global Investment

Sunday 12 October 2025 09:00-10:00

Positioning Free Zones as Investment Gateways for the World's Growth Sectors

- Sector-focused ecosystems: from biotech and AI to sustainable manufacturing
- Clusters and competitiveness: talent, incentives, and value chain orchestration
- Branding and global positioning: turning zones into investment destinations
- Action plan: next steps, roadmap alignment, and Q&A

Closing Ceremony

Sunday 12 October 2025 11:30-12:10

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM

Reimagining Trade: Digital Solutions in an Evolving World

Friday 10 October 13:30 – 15:00

Moderator: James Zhan

Global trade stands at a critical juncture. The combined impact of accelerating digital transformation, shifting geopolitical landscapes, and evolving supply chain models is reshaping the foundations of international commerce. These forces bring forth complex challenges, ranging from trade fragmentation and rising regulatory burdens to supply chain vulnerabilities. Yet, within this complexity lies immense opportunities.

Digital technologies are unlocking new pathways for enhancing trade efficiency, resilience, and inclusivity. As economies navigate this transition, free trade zones and other special economic zones (SEZs) emerge as strategic platforms for piloting and scaling digital trade solutions. These zones can act as testbeds for innovation, attracting digital investments, improving logistics performance, and fostering inclusive growth models aligned with sustainable development goals.

In this context, the Ministerial Roundtable convenes senior policymakers, industry leaders, and global experts to chart a path toward a digitally enabled trade future. The discussion will center on how tools such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and paperless trade systems can be integrated into policy and practice to reduce transaction costs, expand market access, and boost competitiveness.

By focusing on collaboration across sectors and borders, the roundtable aims to identify practical, forward-looking strategies to harness digitalization while addressing risks related to fragmentation, digital divides, and regulatory misalignment.

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM

Key Issues for Ministerial Discussion

Addressing Global Trade Challenges

How can digital innovation help buffer global trade from external shocks, such as geopolitical tensions, climate disruptions, and post-pandemic instability? Ministers will explore ways to build digital resilience into trade systems, ensuring continuity and adaptability in volatile times.

Modernizing Free Trade Zones and Other SEZs

What policies, infrastructure, and digital technologies are needed to position SEZs as magnets for investment and hubs for digital trade? This session will consider how SEZs can lead in piloting smart customs, digital permits, and blockchain-enabled supply chain tracking.

Digital Trade Facilitation

How can governments and the private sector work together to implement interoperable digital systems—such as e-commerce platforms, customs automation, and smart logistics? This topic will address scalability, integration, and public-private coordination.

Inclusive Digital Trade

What targeted measures are needed to ensure that small and medium enterprises (SMEs), women entrepreneurs, and developing economies can meaningfully participate in and benefit from digital trade ecosystems? The discussion will highlight capacity-building, digital skilling, and financial inclusion.

Regulatory Cooperation and Governance

How can countries develop coherent frameworks for cross-border data flows, cybersecurity, and digital standards? Ministers will examine approaches to regulatory harmonization that uphold data privacy, consumer protection, and trust.

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM

Expected Outcomes

The roundtable aims to achieve the following:

- Policy insights on integrating emerging digital tools into national and regional trade strategies.
- Actionable recommendations for leveraging SEZs as enablers of digital innovation in trade.
- Commitment to developing interoperable digital trade frameworks that promote collaboration, trust, and shared prosperity.

The session will conclude with a Ministerial Communiqué on the takeaway messages or a Call to action urging stakeholders to pursue coordinated, inclusive, and tech-enabled trade strategies for a dynamic and interconnected global economy.

First China Comprehensive Free Trade Zone Development International Forum

Sunday 12 October 09:00 – 12:00

Opening Ceremony

9:00 – 9:30

Speakers

Dr. Mohammed Al Zarooni, Chairman of the board, World Free Zone Organization, UAE

Keynote Speeches

9:30 – 10:30

Speakers

Current Situation and Future Trends of World Free Zones — Martin Ibarra/Dr. Samir Hamrouni, World Free Zone Organization

Evolution of the Management and Operation Model of the Dubai Integrated Economic Zone (DIEZ), Dr. Juma Al Matrooshi, Assistant Executive Chairman – Investments and Partnerships Management Office

Networking Tea/coffee Break

10:30 – 10:45

Round Table Forum

10:45 – 12:00

Speakers

Helson Braga, President, ABRAZPE, Brazil

AGENDA - 10-12 OCTOBER 2025

BRICS SEZ MEETING

Saturday 11 October 2025, 14:00-15:00

This session brings together leaders from free zones across BRICS countries to share insights on innovation initiatives, policy reforms, and strategic approaches that promote south-south economic integration. As global trade patterns shift and emerging markets take on an increasingly prominent role, BRICS zones are uniquely positioned to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and investment flows among developing economies. Panelists will highlight innovative practices, including regulatory modernization, digital infrastructure adoption, and sustainable development strategies that enhance zone competitiveness while ensuring inclusive growth. The session will also explore how policy shifts—from streamlined customs procedures to investment facilitation and regional value chain development—are enabling zones to act as gateways for trade, technology transfer, and economic diversification. Participants will gain first-hand perspectives on lessons learned, success factors, and challenges in designing zones that balance economic efficiency with social and environmental impact. Ultimately, this session underscores how BRICS zone leaders are leveraging collaboration, innovation, and forward-looking policy to strengthen south-south integration, unlock new growth opportunities, and deliver prosperity that is shared across regions.

Speakers

Srikanth Badiga, Group Director, Phoenix Group, India
Helson Braga, President, ABRAZPE, Brazil

Entrepreneurial Meeting

Saturday 11 October 2025, 13:00-14:00

This session brings together investors, founders, and innovation agencies to explore how zones can become vibrant ecosystems that support high-growth startups, facilitate foreign direct investment (FDI) and SME matchmaking, and nurture venture capital (VC) networks. Zones have evolved beyond traditional trade and industrial hubs into platforms where innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment converge to drive economic transformation.

Panelists and participants will examine how strategic zone policies, targeted incentives, and collaborative programs can accelerate startup growth and create synergies between local SMEs and international investors. Emphasis will be placed on designing support structures that provide access to funding, mentorship, technology, and global market opportunities. The discussion will also highlight mechanisms for building thriving VC ecosystems, enabling early-stage companies to scale while contributing to regional value chains and economic diversification. Through case studies, practical examples, and interactive dialogue, participants will gain insights into effective approaches for aligning private capital, government support, and innovation-driven enterprises within zone ecosystems. Ultimately, the session underscores the critical role of zones in fostering high-potential startups, catalyzing investment flows, and creating dynamic, sustainable environments that drive inclusive growth and global competitiveness.



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