



Statement by the Foreign Minister of Estonia,

Mr. Urmas Paet,

at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

at the Lutfi Kirdar Convention and Exhibition Center

Istanbul

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Secretary-General, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Representing a European Union member country, I would like to align my statement with the European Union statement delivered by the President of the European Commission Mr. Barroso at the opening session yesterday.

It is my pleasure to address the whole United Nations family here in Istanbul for the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries as a sign of our continuous commitment to the most vulnerable states around the world. The expectations are high on both sides and I hope that in transparent and close dialogue we are able to move considerably closer to meeting these expectations. Firstly, we should reserve a moment for stocktaking and reviewing the achievements made by Member States during the last decade, and thereafter agree on how to proceed while addressing the challenges ahead.

But the time is running out, as there are only four years left to meet the Millennium Development Goals. To achieve these ambitious targets, strong partnership, commitment and coordination between LDCs, middle income countries, emerging economies, and developed countries are needed. Furthermore, the multi-sectoral approach must be strengthened, because all the shareholders – such as international organisations, financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society – have a crucial role to play. In this context the emerging South-South co-operation for LDCs offers excellent opportunities for economic growth. I would also like to reiterate the European Union's call for emerging economies to provide their fair share of assistance to the LDCs.

However, according to the Istanbul Programme of Action, the LDCs themselves have the **ownership** and primary responsibility for their development. While aid does play an important role in meaningful global partnership, we see it as a catalyst rather than a panacea. My country Estonia has recently experienced a fast-track transition into a well-functioning, innovative and modern state. Thus we know all too well that building a state whose citizens fully enjoy civil liberties and economic prosperity is a painstaking task that takes firm and persistent commitment both from the government and from the citizens.

We also believe that peace and security, democracy, good governance, and human rights, including gender equality, are the cornerstones of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and development. In the context of the latter, we would particularly like to stress the importance of openness to global trade and foreign investment. Although Estonia was only taking its first steps towards formulating its development co-operation policy when the Brussels Programme of Action was adopted ten years ago, we are committed to doing our share to achieve our common goal.

Mr. Chairman,

Climate change and **natural disasters** affect us all, but these things may hit less developed countries harder, as they are less prepared and less able to recover. About half of all the humanitarian assistance Estonia provided last year was directed to LDCs, and a large proportion of it was directed towards coping with the consequences of natural disasters, including the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Moreover, during last the decade Estonia has increased its resources for development co-operation tenfold, channeling them through both bilateral activities and via international organisations and funds.

Let me now elaborate on some particularly important issues that are crucial to achieving the goals of LDCs and on which Estonia is focusing most of its development-related efforts, such as education, gender equality, and innovation. These are the key areas, in which a stronger sense of ownership from our partners – the LDCs themselves – is imperative.

Needless to say, **equal rights** as well as the full participation of women and girls is a prerequisite for developing a functioning and fair society anywhere in the world. Estonia's development co-operation activities in this field are mostly aimed at strengthening the participation and leadership of women in many areas including conflict prevention, management and resolution; we also work to improve economic empowerment and eliminate violence against women. Estonia's contributions through UN funds and programs as well as our bilateral development co-operation projects are directed to multiply these efforts.

An important portion of our bilateral projects in this field are carried out in one of our priority partner countries, **Afghanistan**. Our support there is focused on health care and education-related projects for girls and women. In southern Afghanistan we have supported the pediatric wing of the central hospital with essential medical equipment, and we will continue to co-ordinate special programs and trainings for health care workers.

Next, let me emphasise the ever important aspect of **education** in advancing development and growth. Although some countries have made significant progress in improving access to primary education for children and reduced the gap of enrolment between boys and girls, much remains to be done. Increasing

the level of basic literacy is clearly not enough to compete in a world economy. More educated people who could build and maintain financial and health systems and also use and develop new technology are needed. Without technological and social development, it is hard to reduce poverty, child and maternal mortality, as well as the infection rates of many fatal diseases.

As seen from Estonia's own transition experience, the extensive use of **new technology and innovative solutions** is the key to fast-track development. The widespread use of ICT in my country has made it possible for citizens to participate at all levels of decision-making, improved the access to information and transparency in governance, and provided new methods for fighting crime and corruption.

The experts of the Estonian e-Governance Academy are advising governments all over the world in order to help them build up effective e-governance and other infrastructure. We also have co-operation with the governments of LDC countries like Haiti and Zambia. Let me stress that in the digital era, new technology shouldn't be considered a luxury good, but a component of basic infrastructure and an absolute necessity.

Alas, progress in development, especially sustainable development, is moving the slowest in the countries where it is needed the most - that is in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This proves once more that **peace and security** are prerequisites for growth and development. To quote the Secretary-General – *“A world in which billions are suffering from poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease will not be a world at peace.”*

In order to keep our promise and give hope it is essential to take a look back, asking why some countries have made more, some less progress. We need to agree upon the lessons learned from past experiences, keeping in mind that what worked well in certain contexts may not be successful elsewhere.

Let me finally stress that Estonia is ready to provide continuous contributions to the success of this endeavour.

Thank you!