

Federal Ministry for
European and International Affairs

Statement by

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Least Developed Countries**

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Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. President of the Conference,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address this High-level Conference on behalf of Austria today. It provides a unique opportunity to strengthen collective efforts and partnership in support for development. While fully aligning myself with the statement of the European Union, I would like to offer some additional reflections.

At the start of the new Millennium, we have witnessed major progress and achievements: technological innovations, high economic growth rates over years, progress in research, better education – yet the number of Least Developed Countries almost doubled over the past 40 years, while only three of them graduated. The international community adopted major plans and commitments to advance the development of partner countries, and in particular of LDCs – the Brussels Programme of Action 2001, the Monterrey Consensus of 2002, the Millennium Declaration 2000, the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), just to name the major ones.

Numerous follow-up meetings and conferences have taken place since to measure progress achieved and give direction as to the actions needed. Yet, the outcome of all our efforts is still not sufficient - fragility in economic and political terms, vulnerability against external and internal shocks and proneness to the effects of climate change remain major challenges for the LDCs.

Despite general progress, the LDCs experience growing divergences in development patterns and more than half a dozen suffered setbacks over the last decade. While the global financial and economic crises had an impact on all countries, although to various degrees – some LDCs being relatively better off -, it slowed overall growth down. With declining resources, donors now need to focus even more on goals and regions where progress lags behind.

The current assessments of the implementation of the MDGs, especially in the LDCs, conclude on the need for a better inclusion of the most vulnerable into the development process. This means first of all the inclusion of women and girls, the most neglected and the first excluded population groups worldwide. Advancing gender equality and empowering women is a precondition for poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth and social development, since women are important agents of change within their societies. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of entire families and communities; this improves prospects for the next generation.

Austria attaches special importance to the gender dimension in its development cooperation. An expression of this engagement was the co-organisation of a side-event together with the Government of Luxembourg and the United Nations Capital Development Fund on “Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment through Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Development” last evening.

In declaring 2012 the "International Year of Sustainable Energy for All", the UN General Assembly recognized the centrality of energy access and decarbonisation of every day energy supply in developing countries to sustainable development. This approach is interlinked with the strategy to fight climate change. Its overarching goals are to realize, by 2030, universal access to energy for the more than 2 billion people who still lack modern energy services, to reduce energy intensity by 40 per cent and to provide 30% of the world's energy from renewable sources. I am pleased that these targets are also reflected in the outcome document of this conference.

Austria has been advocating for a greater recognition of energy in the context of development policy and cooperation for a long time. Energy and development is also one of the thematic focus areas of our development cooperation with programs in Western Africa, Central America, Bhutan and the Balkans. We strongly support the campaign for universal access to energy by 2030. I am pleased to inform you that Austria will - together with UNIDO and IIASA - host the Vienna Energy Forum 2011 from 21 – 23 June on the overall theme "Energy for All – Time for Action".

I am convinced that a collective effort on a global scale by all actors concerned – partner and donor countries, organizations of the United Nations system and other international stakeholders will contribute to bring all LDCs onto the path of sustainable economic, social and human development and out of poverty.

Thank you for your attention.