



**BELGIUM**

**4<sup>e</sup> Conference on Least Developed Countries**

**Statement by H.E. Yves LETERME,  
Prime Minister of Belgium**

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*Check against delivery*

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Mr President,

Belgian fully supports the Statement the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, made this morning on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me first of all to pay sincere thanks to the Government of Turkey for organising this importance Conference, which emphasises both the importance he attaches to building up a better future for the Least Developed Countries and his determination to support the international community's efforts to take up this major challenge.

I would also like to congratulate the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Cheick Sidi Diarra, and his staff for their painstaking work over the last few months, which I am certain will ensure the real success of this Conference.

One of the keys to meeting the development challenge and reducing poverty is to be found in the Least Developed Countries. The Millennium Development Goals will be achieved only as a result of their full involvement in the process. This is why Belgian regards itself as one of their most sincere and active allies. In percentage terms, Belgian is one of the leading donors to the 48 poorest countries in the world and of their 830 million people. 10 of the 18 Belgian partner cooperation countries are Least Developed Countries.

The excellent report by the Secretary-General shows what has been achieved by the Brussels Action Programme since 2001. The albeit substantial results fell short of the expectations, even in the light of the difficulties that dealt a

serious blow to the international community, and did not leave the LDCs unscathed.

Accordingly, the key challenge of the new Programme, the Istanbul Programme, is to show us how we can do better, in a different way, and at a faster pace.

With this in mind, Mr President, I would like to stress 3 points which I regard as particularly important.

First of all, the Action Programme reflects a strong political commitment. Structural vulnerability is the main obstacle to the LDCs' development. This vulnerability may have an economic cause, particularly because of an overreliance on one productive sector and even one product, or a geographical cause, as in the case of landlocked or island countries, or a political origin, in the case of countries caught up in a conflict or emerging from a conflict. Mention also has to be made of the lack of infrastructures, scarce human resources and a vulnerability to climatic hazards and natural disasters. What are required, then, are approaches that vary according to the specific characteristics of each country, and this also applies to the aid allocation process.

Secondly, as the Secretary-General and the Group of Eminent Persons have reminded us, the LDCs have to make radical changes to their economies and take the development process into their own hands. The Secretary-General's report speaks about the creation of a *developmental state*. This concept refers to a form of governance based on a strategic and participatory partnership between the state, civil society and the private sector. This

means governments being willing to commit themselves to institutional reforms and being accountable for the policies applied and the achievements. Parliaments are required to play a key role in this context. Good governance, which also covers the economic and local fronts, is absolutely essential. Community empowerment, the rule of law, respect for human rights, the fight against corruption, the empowerment of women, and, more generally, gender equality, are central to these reforms. The key aims should include the need for all members of society to participate in the creation and equal distribution of wealth and the exploitation of natural resources in line with a vision of sustainable development.

Over the last two decades, official development aid has been focused on the social sectors. However the renewed interest in the productive sectors, including physical infrastructures, should not be allowed to overshadow the importance of education and health, and, in particular, reproductive health care, in guaranteeing a successful structural change.

Thirdly, the primary responsibility for their development policies lies with the countries themselves but these policies have little chance of success if they cannot count on the support of the international community as a whole. Belgium is certain that this support has to go beyond assistance and a bond of solidarity, to become an economic partnership based on mutual interests. The Least Developed Countries do indeed have to take their rightful place in the global economy but, and more importantly, they also offer a unique potential for growth and exchanges in commercial, economic and human terms whose deployment is definitely in everybody's interest. Belgium remains convinced of the added value of instruments and sources of

innovative financing and defends in this respect the approval of a financial transactions tax at global or European level, to be used for the financing of development goals and global public goods.

To conclude, Belgium is lending its support to the ultimate aim of ensuring the maximum number LDCs leave this category, ideally over the next decade. The achievements under this heading have been quite disappointing since our initial meeting, back in 1981, hence particular attention needs to be given to the graduation process, which Belgium believes will have to continue to be governed by transparent and realistic criteria. This calls for the creation of a well-defined frame of reference together with suitable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. I call upon the Office of the High Representative to develop such mechanisms. The Office should take charge of what Belgium sees as a hugely important coordination work.

A political commitment on all fronts, a focus on the structural vulnerabilities, different approaches, national and international partnerships – these are the key words that should guide us during our work this week and, more importantly, throughout the implementation of the Istanbul Action Plan.

Thank you for your attention.