



Speech by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Evaldas Ignatavičius in the Plenary Meeting of the IV United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

9-13 May 2011, Istanbul

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address the Plenary Meeting of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) today. First of all, I would like to thank to the Secretary-General of the Conference Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Chairman of the Conference Mr. President Abdullah Gul and the Preparatory Committee for the arrangements of this very important event. I am more than confident that this event is very useful for sharing our best practices and lessons learnt and also for identifying new challenges and opportunities for LDCs and the actions required at national and international levels.

In 1971, the international community recognized Least Developed Countries as a category of countries distinguished not only by widespread poverty, but also by the structural weakness of those countries' economic, institutional and human resources, often compounded by geographical handicaps. The group, comprising 25 countries at the time, has been described by the United Nations as "the poorest and weakest segment of the international community" whose economic and social development presents a major challenge both for them and for their development partners.

Today the 48 Least Developed Countries have a total population of more than 880 million people. More than half live in extreme poverty with less than a Euro a day.

Mr. Chairman,

Since restoring independence twenty years ago, Lithuania transformed quickly from recipient to donor. Being a part of European Union, the world's largest donor providing more than half of overall aid, Lithuania is very proud that in the past five years country's official development assistance increased four-fold. In line with overall EU commitments, Lithuania is working to meet the ODA target of 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2015.

It is worth to note, that the biggest part of the Lithuania's official development assistance is allocated to the EU aid. In terms of bilateral assistance, being comparatively small donor, Lithuania's development cooperation focuses on a few priority countries from Eastern Europe to the Middle East,

where we have a comparative advantage arising from our own state-building experience: good governance and democratic reform, rule of law and building a functioning market economy, sustainable development and education.

Lithuania remains firmly committed to continue supporting Afghanistan, where we have taken the lead in the stabilization, reconstruction and development of province of Ghor since 2005.

Today Lithuania's priorities in this country remain unchanged: maintaining secure environment and helping local Afghan authorities for the gradual take-over of responsibility in the Province of Ghor, thus contributing to the development and stability of the whole country. In this regard Lithuania concentrates its development efforts mainly in the areas of administrative capacity building, rural development, healthcare, education and promoting women's social activity. We are very pleased with the level of cooperation between Lithuania, the US, Japan, Greece, EUPOL, UNAMA and other partners in the province of Ghor.

Lithuanian experience in Afghanistan and other partner countries shows that women's empowerment and full participation at all levels of economic, political and social life are key to poverty reduction and economic recovery of LDCs.

Gender equality and women's empowerment issue becomes more and more important in a current world. Today we see that progress has been made in all twelve critical areas of global UN strategic document – Beijing Platform for action, as well as relevant MDGs. But further efforts towards *de facto* equality between women and men are needed in a number of areas until the global gender gap is closed. Gender equality is not just women's issue. It is also a men's issue and further progress on the matter will benefit both men and women, and our societies as a whole.

Lithuania, which has recently began the Second Millennium of life, has long-standing traditions of women's issues and gender equality, starting from the sixteenth century. A couple of years ago we celebrated 100 years anniversary of the first Lithuanian Women's Congress and 100 years since the creation of first women's organisation. Long-term attention to women's issues, consistent and systematic work towards gender equality led to positive achievements in some critical areas.

Today Lithuania is the country, where two of three highest state positions are held by women: President and Speaker of the Parliament. Women also became the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Finances. High level of women's education, high women's employment rate is becoming higher than men's and contribute to women's economic independence and equal status. Strategic measures, including relevant legislation are taken to combat violence against women, trafficking in women and social exclusion.

Seeking to support the *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*, Lithuania follows an example of the number of other countries and is currently preparing a national plan for the implementation of *R 1325*.

Lithuanian gender equality achievements are visible on the EU level. Lithuania became hosting country to the first EU gender equality agency - European Institute for Gender Equality, which was opened on June, last year in Lithuania's capital Vilnius.

In terms of Lithuania's international engagements, this year is especially important. Firstly, because Lithuania has assumed the chair-in-office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Our priorities for the term in office include the issues of the freedom of expression, pluralism in the new media including the internet, promotion of tolerance through education, combating hate crimes, and highlighting the importance of independent human rights institutions for democracy building.

Secondly, in July, by hosting a Community of Democracies Ministerial Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania will conclude its chairing of the Community of Democracies, an intergovernmental forum which unites more than 100 countries and which promotes and strengthens democracy and democratic institutions all over the world. One of the main priorities of Lithuania's Presidency of the CoD is to make cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental structures on the issues of democracy promotion more active.

30th of June this year, in the framework of CoD and under the patronage of the President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė and the President of Finland Tarja Halonen, a high level Conference "*Women Enhancing Democracy: Best Practices*" will take place in Vilnius. This event will bring together leaders from government, business, and civil society, including the representatives from Afghanistan, and will provide them with an opportunity to develop initiatives to increase women's participation in democratic institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

More than ten years since the Millennium Summit, implementation of the Millennium Development Goals remains uneven, both in terms of geography and the level of progress on specific goals. Challenges, both old and new, threaten to slow down and even reverse the progress achieved so far.

Mutual accountability, aid effectiveness, a targeted, results-oriented investment of development money, as well as mobilization of domestic policies and resources are key to solutions of the problems faced by LCDs.

I do believe, that this Conference will become a very important step towards our renewed and strengthened global partnership and will make a significant contribution to our common endeavours approaching internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.