

FINAL VERSION



Statement

by

**Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
and**

**High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked
Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

at the

Inaugural session of the

**Regional Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Least Developed Countries for the
midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the
Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade
2001-2010**

**Bangkok, Thailand
14 March 2006**

Mr. Prime Minister, it is indeed a great honour to have your presence at this inaugural session of the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting for the Least Developed Countries co-organized by UNESCAP and my Office – UN-OHRLLS. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic holds the global chairmanship of the Landlocked Developing Countries, and your contribution to the work of the Landlocked, as well as the Least Developed Countries has been highly laudable. We thank you very much for that.

I now turn to my dear colleague, Mr. Kim Hak-Su, and thank him for the warm welcome to the UNESCAP headquarters. Excellent arrangements made for our meeting are deeply appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of our dear colleague, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of UNECA. We were recently his guests in Addis Ababa for the African LDCs regional meeting, where a successful mid-term review of the Brussels Programme of Action was undertaken. We look forward to similar results here in Bangkok for the Asia-Pacific region.

I also take this opportunity to thank UNDP for the support they have extended to the LDCs around the globe, and for facilitating their participation at regional and other meetings. With UNDP’s support I am confident that we can also make good headway in assisting the LDCs to implement the Brussels Programme.

UNDP Assistant Secretary-General Hafiz Pasha could not join us at this meeting. We are grateful for his continuing support to the most vulnerable countries. We welcomed the joint report “Voices of the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals through a Global Partnership” prepared by UNDP and ESCAP. It was indeed an honour to join hands with these two partner organizations in launching this informative report at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

I am particularly delighted to see that Executive Secretary of UNCDF Richard Weigarten has joined us at this meeting. UNCDF has been a committed partner of the LDCs and is closely involved in the Brussels mid-term review process.

After our meeting in Addis Ababa, it is once again heartening to see colleagues from the UN system and other multilateral institutions here at this meeting. As global partners for development of LDCs, their presence is indeed very pertinent.

At this point in time, we can say that we are well into the preparatory process of the midterm review. The process began with a call for national-level reviews in the 50 LDCs. This national dialogue, which needed to include all stakeholders to make it as broad-based and inclusive as possible, is in fact the very foundation of the review process. It was because of this reason that my Office urged the LDCs to make a timely submission of their national reports. I am happy to inform you that 45 out of 50 LDCs have submitted their reports. In order to facilitate participants at this meeting, my Office has prepared and circulated a synthesis report of the National Reports of the Asia-Pacific

LDCs. A similar synthesis document was prepared separately for the African LDCs and circulated at the regional meeting in Addis Ababa.

The outcomes of these two regional meetings in Africa and in the Asia-Pacific, including the national reports will be available at the LDC global ministerial meeting scheduled to be held in early June 2006 in Cotonou, Benin. As you are all well aware, Benin holds the global chairmanship of the LDCs group, and we are delighted that our global Chairman, Mr. Edouard Aho-Glele, could join us at this meeting. His guidance will be most helpful. We are also grateful for the participation of the Vice Chairs of the Bureau from Bangladesh, Haiti and Nepal.

After the ministerial meeting in Cotonou, in keeping with General Assembly resolution 60/228, the President of the General Assembly will convene a one-day interactive informal hearing of civil society, NGOs and the private sector. This is now scheduled for 22 June 2006 at the United Nations in New York.

Then, in accordance with the same General Assembly resolution, there will be three days of preparatory meeting of experts at the United Nations in New York on 5, 6 and 7 September 2006. All these will then culminate in the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on 19 and 20 September 2006 to undertake the comprehensive global review.

Of the 50 least developed countries, 14 are located in the Asia and Pacific region, and from these, four are landlocked and seven are small islands. Though these countries are quite diverse in terms of population and economic size, natural resources, institutional capacity and geography, they have a combined population of 260 million – making up nearly two-fifths of the population of LDCs. Additionally, they account for over 37 per cent of the population and 46 per cent of the GNP of all LDCs. Annual per capita GDP for the Asia-Pacific LDCs is US\$ 513 and that is only one-fourth of the figure for the Asia-Pacific as a whole. The LDCs are not on track when it comes to the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme, in particular those relating to poverty reduction, minimum nutritional needs, literacy and infant and maternal mortality rates.

On the positive side, since the adoption of the Brussels Programme in 2001, LDCs have been averaging more than 6 per cent per annum growth in GDP - the fastest average rate of growth they have had for decades. I must point out, however, that data is only available for 41 of the 50 LDCs in this context. Of the 41, the number of LDCs that registered GDP growth of above 3 per cent increased from 15 in 2004 to 19 in 2005. At the same time, 4 LDCs are expected to face a decline in per capita GDP in 2006 compared to 9 in 2005.

I would like to reiterate and emphasize that the Brussels Programme of Action continues to be the foremost international development programme which addresses the specific needs of the LDCs. The seven Commitments of the Brussels Programme provide the tools that LDCs need to address their special development challenges.

The LDCs can hope to achieve other internationally agreed development goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals, mainly through the full and effective implementation of the Brussels Programme. This was one of the key messages that was highlighted in Addis Ababa, and UNECA has embarked on mainstreaming the implementation of the Brussels Programme in their work. I urge the UNESCAP to do the same in the Asia-Pacific region so that the implementation of this Programme gains prominence and momentum amongst LDCs of the region and their partners.

In this context, we commend the work of the ESCAP Special Body for LDC/LLDC that meets biennially, back to back with the Commission sessions, in alternate years with the meetings of the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries. The secretariat support unit for these countries does good, substantive work.

It goes without saying that the LDCs are responsible for their own development. Hence, it is essential that these countries embrace people-centred national frameworks and a commitment to good governance.

The LDCs, however, require sustained and adequate development assistance through partnerships for building human, institutional, and industrial and other productive capacities to make globalization work to the advantage of their countries.

International trade and investments are part and parcel of the globalization process. The international trade regime must be conducive to the development of the LDCs. In this regard, we recall the positive outcome in respect of LDCs at the sixth WTO Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong last December.

Environmental protection is an integral part of sustainable development and should be taken into account in all development activities.

Again, one of the key commitments in the Brussels Programme is the need to mobilize resources in support of the development efforts of the LDCs. It is in this regard that development partners and the rest of the international community must fulfill their commitments to the LDCs.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) has increased in nominal terms, and the amount of aid received by the LDCs in recent years is significantly higher than a decade ago. An encouraging development is that major donors have now made commitments to deliver increased and more effective aid to the LDCs and a number of them identified LDCs for priority attention in their respective ODA policy.

But, it is still short of the 0.15 to 0.20 per cent target for ODA to the LDCs reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Without substantive increases in ODA, it will be practically impossible for the LDCs to achieve the goals and targets outlined in the Brussels Programme, including the MDGs.

Another important way of freeing resources for development in the LDCs is the writing off of debt owed by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). The recent cancellation of the multilateral debt of 19 HIPC countries, 13 of which are LDCs is a welcome step forward. The remaining HIPC LDCs should get priority attention for such cancellation.

During the last half decade, we saw increased benefits of South-South cooperation for LDCs. Some developing countries have become important markets, emerging as significant investors in or suppliers of technology, producers of medicinal drugs and providers of technical assistance as well as financial aid and debt relief to LDCs.

At the first-ever LDCs ministerial conference on the impact of remittances on development held in Benin last month, it was highlighted that contrary to conventional belief that migration is largely South-North and remittance flows North-South, South-South migration is estimated to be over half of the migrant stock, and South-South remittances account for 30-45% of the remittances flows in the South. The formal component of that flow reached US\$ 167 billion in 2005, double the size of ODA to all developing countries.

The current trends in international trade, investments, regional and economic integration all offer new opportunities and challenges for South-South cooperation. The third round of negotiations of the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries that is expected to be completed by November 2006 provides another good opportunity for LDCs in the area of trade.

Let me conclude by reiterating that we need to actively engage the international community in ensuring the realization of the goals and objectives of the Brussels Programme. As outlined in Addis Ababa, I would like to again highlight the key ingredients needed to advance that agenda over the course of the next five years.

- Domestic peace and political stability within LDCs is critical to their economic growth.
- Good and effective governance, based on participatory democratic practices and values of human rights is crucial for human development. While development partners can help, the governments in LDCs must ensure that they put into place appropriate people-centered development and social policies
- Policies, projects and programmes to achieve the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme must be put in place at the national level with timelines. In cases where LDCs are constrained, the development partners and the UN Resident Coordinator system must provide the help and assistance needed by the LDCs in this regard.
- Development partners must come forward to provide the additional resources needed to implement the Brussels goals in a timely manner.

- The international trade and financial regimes must provide special support to the development of the LDCs by facilitating increase in trade and market access and by providing debt relief.

-----0-----