



Statement

by

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and**

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at the

**Opening Session of the
Regional Meeting of African 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**

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It is an honour and pleasure for me to join all of you at the start of the formal intergovernmental process for the five-year review of the Brussels Programme as mandated by the UN General Assembly. I am happy that the process is commencing in Addis Ababa, which is the centre for African engagement in regional and global cooperation. In that context, it is also very relevant that the meeting is taking place at this beautiful ECA Conference Centre.

I am delighted to see so many delegates from the LDCs – both from the capitals and from the New York missions joining us here. My warmest welcome to all of you. I am particularly happy that the Chairman of the LDCs group and all other Bureau members are present here. This by itself makes our meeting a landmark event.

I express my heartfelt thanks to my colleague, Executive Secretary Abdoulie Janneh, and the ECA secretariat for the excellent arrangements made for our work here in the capital city of Ethiopia.

I am grateful for the presence of H.E. the Minister for Finance and Economic Development of Ethiopia, Mr. Sufian Ahmed and thank him for gracing the opening session.

It is wonderful to see the Executive Secretary of ESCAP Mr. Kim Hak-su, whose presence shows the solidarity of the UN Regional Commissions in support of the LDCs.

I am sure the same spirit will be manifested when the regional review for the Asia-Pacific LDCs would take place in Bangkok next month

It is wonderful to see so many of our colleagues from UN system and other multilateral institutions who have joined us at this meeting. We are particularly happy to see UNCTAD which has a special programme on LDCs represented here by Mr. Habib Ouane, who heads that programme.

I would also like to take this opportunity to particularly thank UNDP for providing commendable support for the delegates coming from the LDCs. We are encouraged by this wonderful partnership and we appreciate UNDP's important role in recognising the special needs of the LDCs.

As you are all well aware, the year 2006 is a crucial milestone for the Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2001-2010. We are midway through this unique Programme of Action and now have the challenge of review and reflection. This is an opportunity for us to take stock of this collective journey by sharing our concerns and providing each other with valuable insight.

Before I present a broad overview of some of the progress and pitfalls under the Programme of Action, I think it is worthwhile to briefly share with you the various steps of the mid-term review process.

Each of the 50 LDCs was requested to conduct its own national review of the five years of implementation of the Brussels Programme in a bid to gain a holistic perspective of some of the strengths and weaknesses. Based on the outcome of the national reviews, each country prepared a national report, which forms the basis for the midterm review. To facilitate dialogue, my Office has taken the step of synthesizing the national reports in order to highlight the salient issues raised by the LDCs.

Following the national reviews which began towards the end of 2005, this gathering at the regional-level will bring in the regional perspective. Next month we will have the meeting of the Asia-Pacific LDCs in Bangkok. Since we have two LDCs in other regions – Haiti in the Caribbean and Yemen in West Asia, the respective UN regional commissions will undertake the review for their reports. But in order to associate them with the two major regional reviews, Haiti has been invited to join this meeting and Yemen will attend the Bangkok meeting.

Apart from the national and regional reviews, the UN system and international organisations will be undertaking sectoral reviews of the implementation of the Programme of Action. Outcomes of all reviews will be considered at a ministerial meeting in Cotonou, Benin, in June 2006 where the LDCs will agree on a common platform.

Prior to that, as per the General Assembly's resolution 60/228, the President of the General Assembly will organize one-day informal interactive hearings tentatively

fixed for 30 May 2006 to bring in the inputs of civil society, NGOs and the private sector into the review process.

As decided by the General Assembly resolution, a three-day preparatory meeting of experts will take place in New York from 5 to 7 September.

Finally, we will arrive at the High-level Meeting on the Midterm Comprehensive Global Review in the General Assembly of the United Nations on 19 to 20 September 2006.

The calendar of events leading up to the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly will be interspersed with several events and forums resulting from the inter-agency consultations that my Office had organised since last July. A calendar of these events, which would be regularly updated, has been circulated and will be available on my Office website (www.un.org/ohrls).

Let me at this point emphasize again that the Brussels Programme of Action is the foremost international development programme targeted to the specific needs of the LDCs. It is through the effective implementation of this programme that the LDCs can hope to achieve other internationally agreed development goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, the Brussels Programme will help build synergy in realising the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's

Development (NEPAD), which aims at placing African countries on a path of sustained development and enhancing the continent's full integration into the global economy.

To highlight the situation in African LDCs, we must acknowledge that sub-Saharan Africa, home to all 34 African LDCs, is the only region of the world where poverty has in fact deepened in recent years. Its share of world trade halved between 1980 and 2002 and although 13% of the world's population live in Africa, the continent shoulders 28% of world poverty.

However, it should be noted that between 2001-2005 general macroeconomic conditions have improved in most African LDCs, with significant growth spurts in those that are oil exporters. On the other hand, the of landlocked African LDCs continues to face particular challenges in terms of infrastructure and access to markets.

The national reports show that over the past five years, governance has improved in many African LDCs, although conflict continues to fuel poverty in a number of countries. Another encouraging development is the progress made in the area of education with increased enrolment rates. However, LDCs acknowledge that additional investment is sorely needed to improve capacity and educational standards, especially at the secondary level.

Undoubtedly, trade is an important vehicle for spurring economic growth in African LDCs and a number of countries reported that during the period of 2001 to 2005

they experienced an increase in exports. Many are, however, aware that they remain dependent on one or two primary commodities which exposes these economies to export revenue volatility that tends to be growth inhibiting.

The seven Commitments in the Brussels Programme of Action provide the necessary tools that the African LDCs need to address their respective development objectives.

This begins with people-centred national policy frameworks and a commitment to good governance. Partnerships with development partners form the basis of the Programme for building human, institutional, industrial and other productive capacities to make globalization work to the advantage of LDCs.

International trade and investments are part and parcel of globalization. The international trade regime must be conducive for the development of the LDCs. In this regard I was happy to witness the positive outcome in respect of LDCs at the sixth WTO Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December last year.

Environmental protection is an integral part of sustainable development and should be taken into account in all development activities. And finally, the Brussels Programme stresses the need to mobilize resources towards fulfilling the development plans and programmes in the LDCs. It is in this regard, that partners and the rest of the international community must all fulfil their commitments to the LDCs.

Judging from the national reports being considered at this meeting and the assessments conducted by other international organizations, some LDCs have made significant progress, while others continue to lag behind. After five years, we are presented with a mixed score card.

To illustrate my point, since the start 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. 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.

There is little doubt that improvements in political and economic governance have contributed to sustained growth rates. On the other hand, civil conflict and its consequences remain a great concern for the people of countries in such situations.

Allow me to turn your attention to the assistance received from our development partners.

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 in particular. A number of them identified LDCs for priority attention in their respective ODA policy.

But, it is still short of the 0.15 to 2 per cent target for ODA to the LDCs reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Without substantive increases in ODA, it will be difficult for the LDCs to achieve the goals and targets outlined in the Brussels Programme and other internationally-agreed development goals.

Another important way of freeing resources for development in the LDCs is the writing off of multilateral debt owed by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). 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 the next such cancellation.

Over the past five years, we have also witnessed increased attention to the 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 and financial aid to LDCs. At the first ever LDC conference on development impact of remittances held earlier this month in Benin, 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.

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 (GSTP) that is expected to be completed by November 2006 provides another good opportunity for LDCs in the area of trade.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that although quite a number of LDCs are well on their way to implementing the Commitments with their development partners, in some cases the experiences are not so encouraging. We need to engage the international community in ensuring the realization of the goals and objectives of the Brussels Programme. Permit me here to 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-centred 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 Brussels goals in a timely manner.
- The international trade and financial regimes must provide special support to the development of the LDCs.
