

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)

Regional Review on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

14 and 15 March 2006
Bangkok

**Welcome Statement by
Mr Kim Hak-Su,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

*H.E. Mr Bounnhang Vorachith, Prime Minister, Lao People's Democratic Republic
Mr Anwarul K. Chowdhury, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing
States*

*Mr Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic
Commission for Africa*

Mr Richard Weingarten, Executive Secretary, United Nations Capital Development Fund

*Mr Minh Pham, Manager, Regional Colombo Centre, UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and
the Pacific*

Mr Edouard Aho-Glele, Chairman, Global Least Developed Countries Coordination Bureau

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to “UN House” in Asia-Pacific – the venue for the Regional Review on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. This important Review is organized by UNESCAP in close collaboration with the Office of Mr Anwarul K. Chowdhury, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States whose support is much appreciated.

At the outset, let me express my deep appreciation to H.E. Mr Bounnhang Vorachith, Prime Minister, Lao People's Democratic Republic, who has kindly come to Bangkok to inaugurate this landmark Regional Review. We are greatly encouraged by the personal presence of the Honourable Prime Minister. This, I am sure, will convey a strong message to our development partners regarding the commitments of LDCs to the Brussels Programme of Action.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my other colleagues on the podium. Mr Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, has come all the way from Addis Ababa to participate in this meeting. Just three weeks ago, I attended a similar Regional Review for African LDCs in Addis Ababa. Our mutual support in the common endeavor on behalf of LDCs underscores the strong solidarity and commitment of the Regional Commissions in Africa and in Asia-Pacific concerning the cause of LDCs. I sincerely thank Mr Janneh for personally attending the meeting.

Executive Secretary, Mr Richard Weingarten, is representing the United Nations Capital Development Fund. You will be pleased to learn that, under Mr Weingarten's leadership, the fund is working intensively to help reduce poverty in the LDCs through local

development programmes and microfinance operations. I appreciate his coming all the way from New York to join us today.

I welcome Mr Minh Pham, who represents the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. UNDP has been our important partner in many UNESCAP activities, including the present initiative. I thank Mr Hafiz Pasha, Assistant Administrative of UNDP and Director of its Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for his warm support UNDP's generous funding for the LDC delegates to this meeting is much appreciated.

I am pleased to extend a very warm welcome to Mr Edouard Aho-Glele, Chairman, Global Least Developed Countries Coordination Bureau and other members of his delegation. The LDC Bureau is providing excellent coordination and other support at the global level in terms of promoting and sensitizing the Brussels Programme of Action among the broader membership of the United Nations.

Excellencies and distinguished participants,

It is timely to hold the mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 at this juncture is very timely. This is due to the fact that, only six months ago, the world leaders not only reiterated their commitments to the timely and full realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, but they also strongly reiterated their commitments to addressing the special needs of LDCs, particularly through the expeditious implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for LDCs for the decade 2001-2010.

On our part, UNESCAP, with support from our member states in the region, has taken very seriously the task of promoting implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. As a first step towards this initiative, in 2002, I established the *LDC Coordination Unit* under my office with the responsibility of streamlining and coordinating secretariat work pertaining to LDCs, with a view to maximizing the benefits to the 14 LDCs in the Asian and Pacific region. In order to further strengthen the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action at the regional level, in 2003 the Commission at its 59th session adopted resolution 59/4 entitled the "Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010".

To promote the cause of the LDCs of the region to the world community, an advocacy document jointly prepared by UNESCAP and UNDP entitled the "Voices of the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals through a Global Partnership" was launched in New York in July 2005, prior to the 2005 World Summit as well as during the Regional Ministerial Meeting on MDGs in Asia and the Pacific, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in August 2005.

Excellencies and Distinguished Participants,

The comprehensive global-level review of the Brussels Programme of Action is predicated on solid preparations at the country and regional levels. I am pleased to report to you that 12 out of 14 countries in the Asian and Pacific region have prepared their country assessment reports. Based on these reports, the secretariat prepared a regional background document on the "Progress towards Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals through the Implementation of the Programme of Action: Implementation of Regional Support Measures". To facilitate the preparation of this document and to incorporate the views of LDCs in the region, an extensive technical consultation meeting with the LDC focal

points was held in Phnom Penh during 14 to 16 March 2006. This document is before you, to facilitate your discussions as this meeting.

Excellencies and Distinguished Participants,

Let me now share with you some of the key issues concerning the socio-economic situations and the challenges faced by the LDCs of our region. As you may be aware, the LDCs in Asia and the Pacific are diverse. Among the 14 least developed country members of the Commission, four are landlocked and seven are small islands developing states. Bangladesh, with a population of over 140 million, is the largest least developed country, while Tuvalu is the smallest with about 10,000. At the last triennial review of the list of least developed countries in 2003, Timor-Leste was added to the list while Maldives was considered for graduation from it.

The least developed countries face unique challenges. In these countries, implementation of macroeconomic policies may be less than effective, owing to human resource and institutional constraints. External sector performance may be erratic, given their reliance on a narrow range of commodities and trading partners. Provision of government services may be limited, or costly, especially in those countries whose population is widely dispersed. Pre- and post-conflict societies may have inordinately high defence expenditures and reconstruction costs. Local-level delivering of government programmes may be hindered by lack of security. Given such constraints, LDCs are likely to recover quickly from external shocks, ranging from natural disasters to loss of preferential market access.

In view of these challenges, full implementation of the Programme of Action by both the least developed countries and their development partners is critical if these countries are to attain their internationally agreed development goals. A coherent national development strategy, guided by the principles set in the Millennium Declaration, should integrate the commitments of the Programme of Action and address national priorities. Development partners need to ensure that they support the priorities set by the least developed countries in their national development strategies. The progress thus achieved by the least developed countries over the next decade will largely determine whether the Asian and Pacific region will attain the Millennium Development Goals.

Given the diversity of countries in Asia and Pacific, I would like to emphasize the importance of regional cooperation by both developed and developing countries as a modality for implementing the Programme of Action. In this context, I would suggest that the recommendations of this Regional Review focus on **six areas** where such cooperation could be most effective, namely:

1. Financing for development;
2. Trade-enhancing measures;
3. Facilitating temporary movement of natural persons;
4. Technology transfer;
5. Improving the environment; and
6. Ensuring security.

During this Regional Review, I request both the least developed countries and their development partners to review these recommendations as proposed in the document and endorse them with amendments as deemed appropriate. The recommendations endorsed by the Regional Review will comprise the Asian and Pacific region's input to the Global Comprehensive Mid-term Review of the implementation of the Programme of Action. I

assure you that I shall do everything within my means to ensure that our regional contribution receives the attention that it rightly deserves in the Global Review.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.
