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Shanghai, China

Opening Statement of the Executive Secretary

**Side Event on
Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in
the Least Developed Countries through Regional Development Cooperation
23 April 2004, 0900 – 1030 hours
Shanghai, China**

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to the panel discussion “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the Least Developed Countries through Regional Development Cooperation”.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Office of Mr Anwarul K. Chowdhury, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for agreeing to co-organize this meeting. I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce you to H.E. Mr Shen Guofang, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, who has kindly agreed to address this meeting on this critical issue. I also wish to welcome and thank the eminent members of the panel.

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, at the Millennium Summit held in September 2000, the member states of the United Nations issued the Millennium Declaration and committed themselves to a series of goals and targets to be reached by 2015. As indicated in our joint ESCAP/UNDP report “Promoting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty Reduction”, progress towards reaching these goals have varied greatly among countries of the region. However, whether Asian and the Pacific region, as a whole, achieves the Millennium Development Goals, will be determined largely by the progress made by the least developed and other vulnerable countries of the region.

Excellencies and Distinguished Participants,

I would, therefore, like to introduce the least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific region to you. Since the establishment of the list of least developed countries in 1971, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kiribati, Myanmar, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu have joined the original six (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Nepal and Samoa) least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific region. As you are aware, Timor-Leste joined the list less than six months ago. Clustered in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific region, the 14 least developed countries in Asia

and the Pacific region vary widely, with four landlocked countries and seven island developing countries among them.

Among the 50 least developed countries in the world, Bangladesh is the largest (with over 130 million) in terms of population while Tuvalu (having less than 10,000 population) is the smallest. Bangladesh and Myanmar, together, account for nearly three-quarters of the total population in the least developed countries of the region. As noted in the most recent triennial review conducted by the Committee for Development Policy, per capita gross national income ranges from less than US\$ 300 in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Nepal to more than the graduation threshold of US\$ 900 in Kiribati, Maldives, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. While these island least developed countries seem relatively well-off, special considerations for these countries are critical given their small population base, away from the growth centres and, more importantly, high economic vulnerability.

As a result of these differences, the experiences of these countries also vary widely. While some countries have made significant progress, both in social and economic terms, and stand at the threshold of graduation from the list, others have continued to stagnate for more than two decades. In most least developed countries, overall progress towards achieving sustainable growth has often been unbalanced, with success in some areas marred by failure in others. Given these differences, it is necessary to think about the different approaches that need to be taken in order to address each of these countries concerns.

In order to enable these countries to attain the Millennium Development Goals, the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action from the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in May 2001, identified the actions required by both the least developed countries and their development partners. This Programme of Action furthermore highlighted the need for common but differentiated responsibilities of developing and developed countries, whereby South-South cooperation and triangular mechanisms could expand international cooperation.

Given the wide range of financial and technical resources available within Asia and the Pacific region, regional development cooperation could greatly assist and expedite the socio-economic development in the least developed countries. To ensure that each least developed country owns its development, the most appropriate modality of regional cooperation for each of these countries needs to be identified. Since aid alone cannot address the needs of the least developed countries, policy coherence, where agricultural, trade, investment, migration and other policies are mutually supportive of the recipient countries development goals, is also essential at the regional level. These are some of my thoughts on this matter.

Excellencies and Distinguished Participants,

Since discussion of regional development cooperation involves different perspectives, we have invited eminent experts from very different backgrounds and expertise to express their views. As a reflection of the partnership necessary to enable the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, these experts are not only from the least developed countries, but also from developed and developing countries of this region. During this meeting, we would like each of the panelists to suggest different ways to ensure that regional development cooperation can assist socioeconomic development in each of these countries.

As this panel discussion is being held in lieu of the informal consultations with delegations of least developed and landlocked developing countries, I also would like delegations from these countries to share some of their experiences with us and to listen to their views on regional development cooperation. We would also greatly appreciate any proposals for actions to be taken, either by the Office of the High Representative or the ESCAP secretariat, in the future. My colleagues and I will respond to these and any other issues which you feel should be discussed.

Thank you.

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