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UN conference in Istanbul recommits to aid increases and favourable market access for least developed countries

(UNLDC IV, Istanbul, 13 May) A ten-year international action plan for 48 economically vulnerable nations was announced today by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu of Turkey on the closing day of a UN conference in Istanbul.

Countries agreed in the Istanbul Programme of Action to work for favourable market access conditions for all LDCs, including through the reduction or elimination of arbitrary or unjustified non-tariff barriers.

Developed countries at the Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs (9-13 May, hosted by Turkey) committed to realizing the 0.15-0.20 percent of national income target for official development assistance (ODA).

This will entail a significant increase in ODA to LDCs, since aid levels remain at slightly less than 0.1 per cent of donors' gross national income.

Agreement in Istanbul followed several months of negotiations, and a call at the opening of UNLDC IV by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for a "comprehensive and ambitious Programme of Action for sustained economic growth" in the LDCs.

Productive capacity and infrastructure

The hallmark of the plan is an emphasis on productive capacity – building infrastructure, human capital and governance capabilities in the LDCs. Due to reforms in these countries in the last decade, more favourable business environments and a boom in primary commodity prices, growth in these countries has actually exceeded both worldwide and developing country averages.

But such growth has not benefited all LDCs equally, nor has the consequent improvement in living standards been substantial and sustained, according to Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal of Nepal, which currently holds the LDC chair.

"The stress on productive capacity is favoured by LDCs as a means to modernize and diversify economies, create jobs and engage sustainable means to eventually eradicate poverty," said UN Under-Secretary-General Cheick Sidi Diarra, the High Representative for the LDCs, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states.

Foreign investment from Turkey in the LDCs is expected to reach a cumulative US\$10 billion by 2020, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu indicated.

In an era of high food prices, priority action was assigned to revitalizing agriculture and food security. The need to deal with the adverse effects of climate change is also highlighted in the Programme.

Development partners and LDCs committed to good governance, rule of law, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, and democratic participation.

The Conference, attended by 7,000 participants, is to close today with the adoption of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

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