

It is a great honor for me to participate in this very important civil society leaders' meeting and address this Forum on the occasion of this Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries. And I thank the initiative and leadership of the Government of Turkey in hosting this important conference. Turkey is now doing a great contribution for humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than 2,000 NGOs and civil society organizations from around the world are represented here in Istanbul.

You are experts in a variety of fields, from agriculture to climate change, from gender equality to good governance.

The Least Developed Countries – and this conference – depend on your energy and ideas. This is an exciting moment, a very important moment. And this is the first major United Nations conference [this decade] addressing the challenges and aspirations of the least developed countries on this planet.

For the past two years, you have contributed to preparations for this conference.

You have been representing the aspirations of the people of our planet's 48 least developed countries during the national, regional and preparatory processes.

Your voices have been heard and your ideas are reflected in the draft outcome document of this Conference that will be finalized during the next coming five days.

We have to make sure that your voices should be reflected in this outcome document which has to be ambitious and workable in addressing all these difficulties and challenges of Least Developed Countries. Your continued engagement will help to ensure this new Istanbul Programme of Action places the needs of ordinary men and women at the heart of our development planning.

I thank you for your commitment.

As we look back over the past decade since the Brussels Programme of Action, you can take great credit for the advances we have achieved in the well-being of hundreds of millions of men, women and children.

In many Least Developed Countries, more children are attending school, gender equality has improved, more women are finding decent employment, and female representation in government has increased.

Furthermore, democratic elections are now the norm in the LDCs rather than the exception.

All these changes are in no small part due to the relentless efforts of civil society to hold governments accountable.

Governments cannot win the battle against poverty alone. Civil society is a key partner and ally.

My experience as Secretary-General has been that we have to have a very robust, strong trilateral partnership – governments, business communities and civil society. No policies can be implemented harmoniously and successfully without participation and reflecting the voices of civil society, and likewise the business community. That's why I have been meeting business community leaders and civil community leaders.

At the global level, the voice and support of civil society are needed more than ever during this difficult time of financial constraints and austerity measures.

You can raise international awareness of the needs of the LDCs and encourage development partners to honour their promises of cooperation and assistance.

I would like to assure you that the United Nations will remain your ally in this.

The LDCs are poised to be the next wave of development achievement.

Help us to tell the world that investing in LDCs is not charity. It is an opportunity for all.

I wish you a great success in this Forum and I thank you again for your commitment and active participation for the world's most vulnerable nations.

Let us work together to make this world better for all.

Thank you very much.