

26 September 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries**

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to join you today at the opening session of the Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries. I thank the Chair of the LDCs Group, His Excellency the Honorable Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal, for the invitation to address you today.

As President of the General Assembly, I am fully aware of the critical issues facing LDCs. Your countries continue to be among the most vulnerable nations of the world. Global attention on the major challenges you face is often lacking, unless you are engulfed in conflict or devastated by natural disasters. We saw this recently with the tsunami in the Maldives, the earthquake in Haiti and the drought in Somalia.

The current global financial crisis, as well as the world-wide rise in food and fuel prices, have accentuated vulnerability in your nations. As a result, important domestic programmes aimed at reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and meeting the basic needs of your peoples, risk being jeopardized.

This session, addressing these issues will be my high priority. I will seek to accord the most vulnerable countries, most of whom are LDCs, the much-needed support they deserve.

An important issue before us will be consideration of how to best follow-up on the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action, which was agreed by Member States in May this year. [And I join Mr. Shrestha in expressing my appreciation to H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoglu, Foreign Minister of Turkey, for his Government hosting this significant UN Conference].

The Istanbul Programme of Action contains important steps for eradicating poverty, achieving internationally agreed development goals, and reaching the objective of the graduation of half of all LDCs by 2020. The General Assembly subsequently endorsed the Declaration and Programme of Action, and we must start working immediately for the achievement of these goals.

In particular, I stand ready to support Member States in implementing the Programme of Action's request for the General Assembly to establish an ad hoc working group to study and strengthen the smooth transition process for the graduation of LDCs. Countries graduating from the list of LDCs should continue receiving the support of the international community in their development efforts.

The General Assembly must also play its part, in partnership with ECOSOC, in monitoring the Programme of Action. I understand that the 2nd Committee intends to dedicate one of its special events during its formal session to the follow-up of Istanbul. This would be most welcomed.

This session, I have identified four key areas to focus the work of the General Assembly: the peaceful settlement of disputes; UN reform and revitalization; improving disaster prevention and response; and sustainable development and global prosperity. I intend to put special focus on LDCs in undertaking this work.

As regards the “peaceful settlement of disputes”, we must consider solutions to the development challenges posed by chronic conflict in a number of LDCs.

Under the topic, “UN reform and revitalization”, let us reflect on how we can develop coherent policies within the UN system as a whole. In doing so, we can help LDCs overcome the structural challenges they face.

On “Improving disaster prevention and response”, it is imperative that the populations and physical assets of all countries are protected, especially those of LDCs. LDCs tend to have weak institutional and financial capacity in coping with natural and man-made emergencies. The impacts are therefore often more severe and long-lasting. We are currently witnessing this in the Horn of Africa.

And on the issue of “Sustainable development and global prosperity”, common efforts are the only way to tackle the global challenges that disproportionately impact LDCs. In accordance with my mandate, I will also actively engage with the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - Rio+20 - with a view to continuing an open and transparent dialogue on the conference’s objectives and themes. LDCs should feature prominently in this process.

I also believe it would be worthwhile to consider a General Assembly thematic debate on issues of priority to LDCs.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Moving forward these issues in support of LDCs will require a united global partnership. We must use the tools at our disposal that privilege inclusion, collaboration and consensus-building. This will ensure that LDCs are heard and their needs are taken into account. I am pleased to note that the Istanbul Programme of Action considers a united global partnership between all sectors of the international community essential to its implementation.

I am also deeply committed to strengthening our partnership through South-South and triangular cooperation. Such cooperation promotes knowledge sharing between countries facing similar predicaments, and helps LDCs maintain full ownership of their national development strategies. The emphasis placed on South-South cooperation in the Istanbul Programme of Action is therefore most welcomed.

In closing, I look forward to your guidance, support and close cooperation in achieving successful results this General Assembly session, in particular on those issues those related to the interests of LDCs.

Thank you.