

# Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

23-27 January 2022, Doha, Qatar



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## Background Note



UN-OHRLS

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Least Developed Countries

Landlocked Developing Countries

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United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

## New York, UNHQ, 29 March 2021

As the end of the decade of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA) for the Least Developed Countries draws closer, the General Assembly has agreed to convene the Fifth United Nations Conference on the LDCs - LDC5 - in Doha, Qatar, in January 2022, at Heads of State and Government level. See GA resolution 74/232B1.

## LDC5 Conference Mandate

At the Conference, leaders from all UN Member States will gather to:

- Undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the IPOA implementation by the LDCs and their development partners,
- Mobilize additional international support measures and action in favour of the LDCs and,
- Agree on a renewed partnership between the LDCs and their development partners, including the private sector, civil society and governments at all levels.

The Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS) is the UN's focal point for LDC5 Conference preparations and High Representative Fekita Katoa 'Utoikamanu will be the Secretary-General of the Conference. OHRLLS will be working closely with the Host Country, Qatar, which is strongly committed to making LDC5 a success.

## LDC5 Preparatory Process

The preparatory process for LDC5 will be based on country-level, regional and global substantive reviews of all IPoA priorities, involving all major IPoA stakeholders. The outcomes of these inclusive and broad-based reviews will feed into the work of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), whose mandate is -

to agree on elements of the new Programme of Action for the LDCs that will then be finalised and adopted by the Doha Conference. The LDC5 PrepCom will elect two co-Chairs and a Bureau.

It will meet according to the following revised schedule:

- Organizational Session, 8 February 2021
- 1st session: 24-28 May 2021
- 2nd session: 26-30 July 2021.

## LDC5 Conference Preparations in the COVID-19 Era

The fifth UN programme for the LDCs will be adopted at an exceptionally critical time. The ambition behind the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is severely jeopardised by COVID-19. From immeasurable human suffering to an unprecedented global social and economic crisis, the pandemic is derailing years of hard-won development gains and causing progress on poverty, hunger and unemployment to slide backwards. Inequalities have deepened and widened, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable groups and countries.

The COVID-19 virus quickly spread across the world. LDCs in sub-Saharan Africa, Caribbean and Asia-Pacific have seen the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths grow exponentially. This grim picture is likely even bleaker, given the largely insufficient testing capacity that may lead to underestimating the level of true infections in many LDCs.

The reality of the 46 LDCs is that, when they were struck by the virus, they were already lagging far behind on all SDGs.



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## A New Urgency for Action

About 40% of world's poor live in LDCs. On average, two thirds of the urban population live in slums. Many are suffering conflict or emerging from one. LDCs account for 14% of world population but only about 1.3% of global GDP and less than 1% of global trade and FDI. Still barely a fifth of the population in LDCs has access to the internet, though that number is rising.

Suffering from multiple long-standing structural vulnerabilities, including weak public health services and minimal resources to prevent or mitigate the spread of any virus, LDCs instituted lockdowns and difficult-to-implement social distancing measures. Vulnerable groups in the informal sector are facing the difficult choice between health and subsistence. Their fragile education systems are struggling to find ways to resume school amid the global pandemic since remote learning is, by and large, simply not a feasible option. Furthermore, LDC economies were completely unprepared to withstand the collapse of global demand for the products and services on whose export they rely.

The pandemic is a devastating blow to livelihoods throughout all LDC regions. It is now threatening to roll back progress made by a growing number of LDCs on the path to graduation out of the category.

It is against this backdrop that the preparatory process for the LDC5 Conference, which had been in full swing since 2019, was brought – like many other intergovernmental processes - to a sudden pause in early March 2020.

## Road to LDC5 and new programme of action

OHRLLS, in close coordination with the LDC Group, had to postpone the planned African and Asia-Pacific regional review meetings. This led to the need to also reschedule the PrepCom sessions and the Conference itself. (Refer to GA resolution 74/232B as mentioned above.)

Since September 2020, the preparatory process for LDC5 has been in full swing again, having pivoted to virtual meetings and consultations. OHRLLS also launched a dedicated website covering everything related to LDC5.

As the international community came together to pay tribute to the 75th anniversary of the UN and showing much needed solidarity in times of crisis, the LDC Group has called for a stimulus package to support their countries recover and build back better from the pandemic. Such call was reiterated by LDC Ministers in their 2020 LDC ministerial declaration.

The new programme of action for the LDCs needs to be based on a solid foundation of national ownership and leadership driven by a reinvigorated global partnership for their increased resilience and sustainable development.

The 2021 SG Report on IPoA implementation (advanced unedited text), prepared by OHRLLS, highlights the unique opportunity of LDC5 to craft an ambitious outcome document for recovery from the pandemic and chart the course towards sustainable development for the next decade. It calls for equitable and timely access to the COVID-19 vaccine and enhanced financial support from the international community addressing indebtedness of LDCs and reversing the decline in ODA and prioritizing LDCs. Added to that, the heavy toll from climate change related disasters in LDCs has crossed the emergency threshold and requires building of resilience and strong policies for youth, education, and food security. COVID-19 and its impact increased the need to promote digital access and broadband connectivity in LDCs as one of the effective ways to build a resilient society in the face of new and emerging challenges.

**National reviews** of the implementation of the IPOA were undertaken by the LDCs during 2019 and early 2020. The network of LDC National Focal Points played a key role in the preparation of the national reports. 28 LDCs have submitted their final national review report to OHRLLS. The Office is finalizing an analytical review and assessment in the Preliminary Report on lessons learned, drawing upon the extensive National Reports.



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The two **regional review meetings** have been rescheduled. The Africa Regional Review (also covering Haiti) was held virtually from 22 to 26 February 2021 hosted by the Government of the Republic of Malawi, as chair of the LDC Group, and the UN-ECA. The meeting adopted a Political Declaration by African LDC Ministers, which outlines components of a renewed partnership for sustainable development between the African LDCs and their development partners. The Asia-Pacific Review is co-organized by OHRLLS with the government of Bangladesh and ESCAP and will take place from 28 June to 02 July. Both reviews involve all LDCs, their development partners and various UN system entities.

At the global level, in addition to the intergovernmental process described above, OHRLLS will organise consultative meetings for the Ambassadors of LDCs and Friends of LDCs in New York to find consensus on new priorities.

## Inclusive and broad-based

Conference preparations have been designed by OHRLLS to sequence analytical inputs and policy recommendations towards building that strengthened global partnership.

OHRLLS continues to coordinate the interagency consultative group on IPoA and its contributions to LDC5. UN Agencies, as well as the World Bank and IMF, the WTO and other relevant international and regional organizations, have been invited to collaborate on the organization of pre-conference events and undertake thematic appraisals and propose sector-by-sector strategies to further progress in LDC's sustainable development.

The first such event was the 8th LDC Ministerial Conference, co-organized by UNIDO and UN-OHRLLS on 2 November 2019 in Abu Dhabi. The conference adopted a ministerial declaration on accelerating industrialization in LDCs.

In addition, several UN system organizations and other stakeholders are in the process of preparing substantive reports and inputs to the LDC5 Conference.

These include for example a high level event on 21-23 October 2020 entitled "Towards UN LDC5: Recovery from COVID-19 - Tackling Vulnerabilities and Leveraging Scarce Resources," jointly organized by OECD Development Center, Ferdi and UN-OHRLLS; as well as a special event on 19 November 2021 entitled "Leaving no one behind and building back better from COVID-19: The Future of Work in LDCs", jointly organized by UN-OHRLLS and ILO.

The President of the General Assembly and the President of ECOSOC are planning a special event on 18 June 2021 on accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind in the context of COVID-19. The event will also discuss how to strengthen global partnerships for sustainable development and will build on recent processes like the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative (FFDI), co-convened by Canada, Jamaica and the United Nations.

Furthermore, OHRLLS is taking steps to ensure the full involvement of **UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams** in all 46 LDCs.

An **LDC Future Forum**, jointly organized by UNU-WIDER, SDSN, OHRLLS and the Government of Finland, will take place in Helsinki, Finland from 30 August to 1 September 2021 with the objective to provide an analytical underpinning, and leading to more informed debates and intergovernmental negotiations of the new programme of action for the LDCs.

Preparations at the national, regional and global levels, pre-conference events as well as contributions from the private sector, academia, civil society and parliamentarians will provide evidence-based inputs for the new programme of action to be negotiated and adopted at LDC5 in Doha in January 2022.

OHRLLS and the LDC Group are very grateful for Qatar, Turkey and Finland's generous support to LDC5 preparations and welcome everyone to contribute to the success of the conference.





## Further Information

For any further information on LDC5 preparations

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