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**United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least  
Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small  
Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)**

**Closing remarks by  
Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu  
High Representative and Under-Secretary-General  
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and  
Small Island Developing States**

**at the Africa Regional Review Meeting  
in preparation for the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs**

**26 February 2021  
Virtual Zoom Meeting**

Your Excellency, Dr. Chilima, Vice President of the Republic of Malawi,

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are closing a week-long intense, enlightening, and productive conversation.

I express my deep gratitude to you, Dr. Chilima, and to the Government of the Republic of Malawi, for hosting us.

Thank you so much for making us feel like being in the warm heart of Africa!

We received such great collaboration at all levels from Ambassador Ligoya and the mission here in NY to the coordination team in Lilongwe.

We owe a special thanks also to the Resident Coordinator, Maria Jose Macho, and her team for their partnership.

More than 900 registered participants were with us for these 5 days. 28 out of 33 African LDCs plus Haiti were represented.

His Excellency Dr. Chakwera, President of the Republic of Malawi, addressed us, we heard from many ministers and other officials from LDCs.

We heard from development partners, from representatives of the private sector and civil society, including academia and youth.

We are of course grateful to all of you for sharing your experiences and insights. It was the dialogue and participation needed to move forward.

We learned a lot from each other and we must continue the discussions started this week.

This could also not have been done without the support of the Governments of Turkey and Qatar.

It was also a truly ONE UN meeting.

I especially thank FAO, UNDP, the Technology Bank, and UNCDF for the excellent collaboration to make this meeting a success.

Representatives from almost 30 UN organisations shared their analysis and ideas on how to go forward on our road to Doha, Qatar for the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs in January 2022.

We look forward to continuing work with all of you over the next 11 months.

The summary of the meeting will feed into the work of the Preparatory Committee.

The first meeting of the Preparatory Committee will take place at the end of May. You can find information on the entire preparatory process for LDC5 on the OHRLLS website.

We had a rich discussion and brought together concrete ideas.

I cannot possibly summarize them all right now, but let me highlight a few key points.

Just as elsewhere, COVID-19 has profoundly serious consequences for the lives and livelihoods of LDCs in Africa and Haiti.

Building back better will be a challenge.

But there is hope when people and countries work together. For example, Senegal is sharing technology and vaccines with neighbors and several development partners recognized the need for solidarity and are increasing resources for COVAX and other global initiatives.

Several speakers mentioned that the pandemic, while it affects everyone in different ways, also presents an opportunity to do things differently and accelerate true transformation.

One example is the need to transform the digital divide into a digital bridge.

For this, we need to make sure an ecosystem for digital transformation is in place. This includes affordable broadband access and digital "fluency" with the right skills, especially for young people. Digital transformation goes so very much beyond improving productive capacity. It can give a voice to people, create an innovative partnership, and indeed a bridge between so many and on so much!

Then there is the important area of trade.

The recently launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides additional market access opportunities for African LDCs.

There is great untapped potential in e-commerce and opportunities for LDCs to integrate into regional and global value chains.

Of course, physical infrastructure, like transport systems is important but investing in and making the soft infrastructures, including regulatory, customs, and business environment work is equally important.

Aid for trade plays a crucial role.

We must look into strengthening those sectors and value chains that have the greatest potential for poverty reduction and inclusiveness and streamlining of the gender dimension.

Just this morning we talked about climate risks and how sustainable energy can be a part of the solution.

If we do not take mitigation and adaptation to climate change more seriously, we will not achieve any of our goals.

If we just look at agriculture, which is the sector with the highest employment in almost all African LDCs and Haiti, it is clear that poverty and hunger are bound to increase if we do not reduce CO2 emissions.

But there are also many solutions available and these will be further discussed at COP26 in November this year.

OHRLLS has provided support to Malawi to develop access to sustainable energy in the country. We plan to provide a platform to share Malawi's experience with other LDCs. These opportunities for peer learning are crucial to share lessons and concrete solutions.

Of course, a lot of this hinges on the availability of resources.

The LDCs need to put their resources into action and prioritize inclusive and sustainable development for all their citizens.

All stakeholders need to stop the diversion of resources, be it through illicit financial flows or corruption.

There is also the need for more external finance, but the right kind.

This ranges from ODA that is effective. Effectiveness includes being aligned with country priorities and supports the mobilization of other resources, includes improving tax administrations, and includes looking for blended finance.

It also includes working towards changing the risk perception of LDCs.

It also means that it is now that we must deal with unsustainable debt levels.

Measures must be taken that are responsible, innovative, and lead to long-term solutions such as debt cancellation, debt swaps, and debt workouts.

Last but by no means least, we need to work more closely with the private sector.

We are often told money is there, but we need to channel private finance into sustainable development action that contributes to job creation.

We need a better policy environment and conditions for micro-, small and medium enterprises. We should pay special attention to enterprises run by women and ensure they can be more productive and contribute towards transforming LDCs economies.

I would like to close my remarks by highlighting the importance of youth in this process.

I am so grateful for the youth representatives that took the time to contribute to our discussions.

We need your optimism but also your realism.

You know that the problems we face are huge, but we have the power to solve them if we work together in solidarity.

We need to listen more to you, we need so much more inter-generational dialogue, as this is your future we talk about.

There is a lot of work ahead.

Failure is not an option and we must craft a roadmap for a better future for the LDCs together. For this to work, we need political will and effective partnerships across all sectors and all borders.

We must build back better and greener for all and enhance resilience to future shocks.

I thank you.