



**Organizational session of the Preparatory Committee for LDC 5
Conference**

New York, 8 February 2021`

Statement by the European Union

[Check against delivery]

Madame Under Secretary-General. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Secretary General of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries,

dear Co-chairs, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

We congratulate Bangladesh and Canada on their election as co-chairs and Ethiopia, Uganda, Nepal, Czech Republic, Haiti, Paraguay, and Turkey as members of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee.

We thank Qatar for the briefing on the status of the preparation of the Conference and look forward to effective and timely organisation .

[Importance of LDC5 Conference]

The LDC5 conference in Doha in January 2022 will chart out the international community's **vision and strategy for the next decade for sustainable development in the 46 countries most in need, which are home to 900 million people**, half of which live below the poverty line. This overlaps with the remaining period of the 2030 Agenda and the Secretary General's "Decade of Action". More than anywhere, action is needed in the LDCs if we want to collectively meet the common goals of the 2030 Agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious disruption of economies and societies everywhere, and in particular in LDCs. Building Back Better, greener and fairer will have to be an integral part of the plan. This also calls for special emphasis on the principle of leaving no one behind, as the impact of COVID-19 is disproportionately negative for people in vulnerable situations.

[EU engagement]

The European Union **will actively engage in the process** reflecting the importance it attaches to the LDCs as their largest development and trading partner. The European Consensus on Development promises to focus on the **greatest needs**, where we can have the **biggest impact**, especially in the **least developed, fragile and conflict-affected** countries.

Our **trade policies** provide duty-free quota-free access to all products from LDCs except arms, and our imports from LDCs increased by 17% between 2017 and 2019, reaching EUR 39 billion in 2019. As the largest provider of aid-for trade we help partner countries increase their trade capacity. And we also provide guarantees to de-risk investment. Beyond official development aid (EUR 19 billion in 2019 to LDCs) we seek to help partner countries unlock the full potential of all financial resources, domestic and external, through support to **Integrated National Financing Frameworks** (INFFs), implemented in almost half of all LDCs.

[Expectation on the LDC5 Conference]

The real success of the conference will not be in numbers and pages of document produced, but in **the difference the decisions will bring to the lives of the people**, and the progress countries make towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In a context dominated by COVID-19, this progress will be inseparable from our efforts towards recovering better, greener and fairer.

[Aligning and Integrating with other major UN Processes]

To achieve the 2030 Agenda, the whole world has to pull together. The LDC Programme of Action has to focus on the SDGs and prioritize action to achieve them, based on lessons learned. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) conducted by the individual countries, should be fully integrated. The VNR process is an important part of the follow-up and accelerated implementation of Agenda 2030

2021 will be a crucial year for ambition to address climate change and biodiversity loss. The **LDCs are most vulnerable to the escalating planetary crisis**. Therefore, we need to ensure that the LDC5 Conference develops synergies with all the major processes and conferences that run in parallel to the preparatory process, including the Financing for Development Follow-Up Forum, the Secretary-General's Food Systems Summit, the High-Level Dialogue for Energy, the UNFCCC COP26, but also the Biodiversity COP 15.

[Inclusiveness of the Process]

We welcome the announcement that the LDC5 process will be conducted in a participatory manner with invitations to civil society, and private sector, and we strongly **encourage true inclusivity**, with meaningful representation of women and youth. Today's generation of young people is the largest in history, with over 90% living in developing countries. We therefore vital that all young people's varied experiences, opinions and perspectives are represented. This also holds true for other groups that are frequently left out.

[Graduation]

We congratulate the Maldives, Samoa, Equatorial Guinea and Vanuatu on their graduation since the Istanbul Programme of Action was adopted. **The ultimate success will be for all Least Developed Countries to graduate**. This was probably the idea behind the target set in Istanbul to graduate 50% of LDCs. This target was missed even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The reasons have yet to be better understood, and this analysis has to underpin any new target that will be set in Doha and the commitments required from LDCs and their development partners.

[Fragility and Conflict]

This analysis has to take into account that **three out of four LDCs are affected by fragility and conflict**. Their development achievements are at risk of being

wiped out by recurrent conflicts. This highlights the importance of the paying attention to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and the need for raising attention to conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity, including in development partner assistance programmes.

[COVID-19]

COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge impacting heavily on the lives of all people around the globe. The European Union considers that we can only **address this challenge together, in unity and solidarity**. The pandemic and its repercussions are exacerbating structural vulnerabilities in LDCs, adding up to existing development challenges. We cannot allow decades of progress to be reversed and further jeopardize the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. And we have to make sure that the lessons learned from the current pandemic will promote a more resilient global health architecture and an increased capacity of preparedness and response.

The **COVID-19 Omnibus Resolution** adopted by the General Assembly last September recognizes with deep concern the special challenges faced by the most vulnerable countries, including the LDCs, and calls for special support in the areas of aid, capacity building, and aid for trade.

The European Union has stepped up efforts to **combat the impact of COVID-19** in our partner countries. This includes a Team Europe financial package from the European Commission, Member States, and European financial Institutions to tackle the consequences of the pandemic (amounting to EUR 38.5 billion to-date) aiming to generate sustainable investment, green jobs and protect livelihoods.

The European Union initiated early in the process (May) a **Vaccines Initiative together with a Pledging Conference** to ensure global and equitable access to vaccines, diagnosis and therapeutics. Out of the €15.9 billion raised since 4 May, €11.9 billion was pledged by the Member States, the Commission and the European Investment Bank.

We can only overcome this pandemic together, working through multilateral institutions and inspired by the recognition that **“no one is safe until everyone is safe”**. In our response the Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) – Accelerator and particularly the COVAX facility plays a key role in ensuring fair and equitable worldwide access to vaccines, but also diagnostics and therapeutics. We are confident that ACT-A will continue to help us overcome this crisis and are happy to hear that the **vaccine distribution is about to start**. According to the COVAX distribution forecast published on 3 February, the vast majority of LDCs will

receive the first COVID-19 vaccines still the first quarter of this year.

We trust that this development will be an important stepping stone towards a successful LDC5 Conference in Doha in January 2022 and we are more than pleased if we have been able to contribute to it.

I thank you.