

Statement by Hon. Dr. Biswo Nath Poudel, Vice-Chair of National Planning Commission and the Head of Nepali Delegation, at the High-level Asia-Pacific Regional Review Meeting on the IPoA in preparation of the Fifth United Nations Conference on LDCs
Geneva, 30 August 2021

Mr. Chairman,

Honorable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

1. At the outset, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh, OHRLLS and UNESCAP for convening this important meeting despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates our strong solidarity to address our common concerns.
2. Though significant progress has been made across the eight priority areas of the IPoA by all LDCs over the last decade, the overall level of the implementation has been mixed and uneven. This clearly indicates that the road to sustainable development will not be easy for all the Asia-Pacific LDCs and Yemen.
3. In Nepal, we have been consistently demonstrating strong political commitment and leadership to eradicate poverty through promoting rapid and inclusive growth. We have integrated global and regional development goals, including the Istanbul Program of Action into our development plan and made effort for their effective implementation.
4. Nepal has made significant improvement on reducing poverty, providing basic health services, as well as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. There have also been improvements on access to safe water and sanitation and generation of renewable energy.
5. Significant gains on mobile network coverage and access to the internet were made, which has become even more critical during lockdowns and travel restrictions posed by the global pandemic.
6. The Government of Nepal provides a large number of social protection scheme including allowances for widows, senior citizens, the disabled, child grants and various employment programs.
7. However, the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic has pummeled our prospects of development with far reaching socio-economic implications. It has further exacerbated the pre-existing challenges, undermined our hard-earned development gains and put our graduation plan in peril.
8. We cannot afford to let this happen, while we have declared in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that no one will be left behind.

Mr. Chairman,

9. As we are preparing for the LDC5, I would like to highlight some of the issues, which deserve our special attention in preparation of the Conference:
 10. First, the LDC5 must be a platform to garner enhanced level of support to the most vulnerable countries that are already the furthest behind. Our focus should be on the comprehensive assessment of the implementation of IPoA, identifying obstacles and constraints encountered, as well as actions and initiatives needed to address those challenges.
 11. Second, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the need to take a more integrated approach in order to increase economic diversification and structural transformation and reduce vulnerability and poverty of Asia-Pacific LDCs.
 12. The overarching goal ahead should be to effectively respond to the pandemic and its fallouts while keeping in focus the attainment of SDGs.
 13. Also, the biggest moral test before us is to ensure an equitable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. Nepal calls for meaningful international cooperation to facilitate easy access to vaccines for all.
 14. Third, this should be a platform where LDCs and development partners would renew their partnership for doing more on each of their part. Enhanced support must be provided from the development partners to achieve the SDGs and goals set out in LDCs' Program of Action.
 15. Similarly, support measures must be ensured to the countries in the graduation pipeline and to those that have recently graduated. It is even more critical for the resilient recovery from the pandemic and for their smooth, sustainable and irreversible graduation.
 16. Fourth, the pandemic amplifies debt distress in the Asia-Pacific LDCs. We welcome various debt relief measures and call for a comprehensive debt relief initiative including debt cancellation.
 17. Fifth, a full compliance of ODA commitment from our development partners must be ensured. Equal focus should also be given to encourage scaling up FDI and aid for trade in productive sectors in Asia-Pacific LDCs.
 18. Sixth, many of Asia-Pacific LDCs are on the wrong end of the digital divide with the lowest rates of internet access. Again, support from development partners can play a vital role to connect the unconnected in LDCs with the "whole-of-society" approach.
 19. Seventh, LDCs are facing a sharp end of climate change despite their negligible share in GHG emission. Time is now to ensure climate justice and accessible climate finance.
 20. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, development aspirations of the Asia-Pacific LDCs have already been significantly deferred. They must not be permanently delayed. We are confident that the LDC5 will be a milestone of renewed commitments and partnership to ensure a better and sustainable future for the LDCs.
 21. Nepal is determined to do more on its part to make its graduation a smooth, sustainable and irreversible process.
- I thank you for your attention.