



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

Statement by

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**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

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Virtual Zoom Meeting

Opening remarks

Honorable Mr. Gospel Kazako, Minister of Information, Republic of Malawi, thank you for giving me the floor.

Right Honourable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima, Vice President of the Republic of Malawi,

Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express my deep gratitude to you, Right Hon. Dr. Saulos Chilima, as well as to His Excellency President Lazarus Chakwera and the Government of Malawi, for your commitment and leadership in steering the Group of Least Developed Countries at the United Nations and for hosting the Africa Regional Review Meeting this week.

I express my appreciation to the Government of Qatar as the host country of the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs in January 2022 in Doha and Turkey as the host country for the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs 10 years ago, for their valuable and generous contributions to the meeting.

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome all participants to the Africa Regional Review Meeting, which represents a key milestone in the preparatory process towards the LDC5 Conference. I am particularly grateful that you have been able to set aside the time to respond to our invitation, despite your busy schedule. I take it as a sign of the large reserve of goodwill and commitment that exist, across African LDCs and among their development partners, towards the development agenda of LDCs.

I sincerely wish we could all have gathered in person in Lilongwe for this Meeting. But it is great to connect with you all virtually, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic continues its global spread and we remain deeply concerned by the ongoing threat to the health of our peoples as well as the prolonged economic downturn the pandemic has already caused.

After more than twelve months of the ongoing pandemic, it is clear that the health, economic and social shocks have affected African LDCs and Haiti severely and disproportionately.

The COVID-19 pandemic is happening in conjunction with huge uncertainties and shifts in environmental conditions. The effects of the ongoing climate change are posing an additional and serious threat to the development prospects of LDCs.

The progress that has been made throughout the last decade during the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action has been mixed and the road to sustainable development has not been easy for the African LDCs and Haiti.

On the one hand, they have made important strides.

We have seen positive trends on tackling poverty, health, 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.

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.

Now, it has been particularly difficult to witness, how hard-won development gains that many countries had been making are very much under threat by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With more and more vaccines coming to market, there is hope now that the worst of the pandemic may be over soon. Every effort must be made to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines around the world.

We need to ensure that vaccines are treated as a global public good – available and affordable to everyone, no matter where they live.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres addressed the importance of equitable access to vaccines just last week, describing it as “the biggest moral test before the global community”.

He continues: “[...] progress on vaccinations has been wildly uneven and unfair. Just 10 countries have administered 75 per cent of all COVID-19 vaccines. Meanwhile, more than 130 countries have not received a single dose. Those affected by conflict and insecurity are at particular risk of being left behind”.

As we pave the way towards next year’s LDC5 Conference, it is clear that the stakes are high for Africa’s 33 LDCs and Haiti.

We must do everything we can to leverage the Conference to reach global agreement on how to overcome the impacts of COVID-19, ensure that the actual depth and breadth of challenges that LDCs are facing are well known to the international community, and regain lost momentum and opportunities the pandemic has brought about.

The LDC5 Conference will need to chart out an ambitious agenda to enable LDCs to build back better, increase resilience, and achieve the SDGs and graduation thresholds.

During this week of the Africa Regional Review, we will review progress on the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action over the past decade and focus on what needs to be done to boost the development prospects of African LDCs.

Discussions will focus on overcoming the pandemic, to tackling the climate crisis, strengthening trade, to innovative ideas mobilizing resources, rethinking structural transformation in the digital era, and building more peaceful and inclusive societies.

Equally important is how the international community will support development of the LDCs over the next decade.

A common theme that will run through this week's discussions will be how Africa's LDCs can get back on track and build back better from this current crisis but in particular how to build resilience and transform lives in LDCs.

The outcome of this week's meeting will be an important step in the preparations for the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs next January in Doha, Qatar.

The outcome of that conference will be a new programme of action, which will coincide with the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is an opportunity for a determined effort by the international community, not only to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but simultaneously ensure that the LDCs are at the core of any effort and are not left behind.

In closing, I wish you and us all a productive and successful Africa Regional Review Meeting and look forward to inspiring contributions and discussions.

I thank you very much for your attention.