



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

**Statement by
Mr. Courtenay Rattray
Under-Secretary-General
and
High Representative
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small
Island Developing States
at
the Opening session of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review Meeting
on the theme “From Istanbul to Doha - a journey towards sustainable and
resilient development: The Asia Pacific stories for graduation”
30 August 2021, 9:00 – 10:00 hrs.
Geneva, Switzerland
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Madam Chairperson
Honourable Ministers
Presidents of the General Assembly and ECOSOC
Distinguished colleagues from the UN system
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

Let me thank the Government of Bangladesh and the UN-ESCAP for organizing this meeting jointly with my Office. This meeting is mandated by the General Assembly and the ECOSOC as part of the preparatory process for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. As you may know, it was slated to be held earlier in our schedule, but had to be postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Asia-Pacific review meeting provides an opportunity for us to consider and assess the status of implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action by the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. As we chart the course for the next 10-year programme of action for LDCs, it also provides an opportunity to reflect on what works within the region and what does not, and to draw salient lessons for the future.

Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The LDCs in this part of the world were, pre-pandemic, on course to make tangible socio-economic progress. On average, their GDP was growing by more than 6 per cent during the implementation period of the IPoA. They also registered tangible progress in their socio-economic development. This progress has led ten out of 11 LDCs of this region to reach some point in the graduation pipeline, meeting the thresholds at least once. This was a remarkable sign of progress in their journey to achieve the SDGs.

Despite progress made by the vast majority of the Asia-Pacific LDCs, they continue to face severe challenges due to their inherent structural challenges, as well as new and emerging ones. Two LDCs in the region are trapped in conflict and post-conflict situations, causing humanitarian crises and severely impeding progress towards the goals and targets of the IPoA.

The most severe recent challenge encountered by the LDCs is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has dimmed their prospects for graduation and smooth transition. It has also retarded prospects for realizing the SDGs. LDCs of this region have experienced substantial slow-down in their economic growth, widespread unemployment, sharp contractions in international trade, and a significant slowdown in the flow of external resources. In this latter regard, there has been an almost complete halt in the travel and tourism sectors. Education systems have also been disrupted severely.

Climate change is another threat that severely affects these countries. Natural hazards such as floods, droughts, cyclones and tornados are common features of this region and the ongoing sea-level rise is a life and death question for many island and low-lying coastal countries.

Furthermore, notwithstanding some progress achieved in the socio-economic fields, structural transformation has not taken place in the region. This is reflective of the common challenges that most LDCs have been facing. LDCs in the region also lack adequate fiscal buffers with which to withstand shocks and crises, which renders them highly vulnerable to external shocks.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building a strong economic base that is dynamic, sustainable and resilient, is the route to ensuring that these countries will be able to better cope with emerging challenges and crises. This will be the central focus of next year's LDC5 conference. The collective challenge before us is to design a toolkit for LDCs that will accelerate their sustainable recovery and ensure their resilience against future shocks and crises through structural transformation and the strategic application of science, technology and innovation. These are the productivity drivers that will serve as a spur to the achievement of sustainable economic growth.

With this in mind, my Office is engaging in a comprehensive preparatory process in the run-up to the LDC5 conference. Most of the preparatory work was already undertaken over the past two and a half years and the substantive preparations have laid a solid basis for designing the next programme of action for LDCs.

Based on the inputs that have emerged from various meetings, conferences and reports, the LDCs group prepared and presented a zero draft Outcome Document that centred on six key priority areas. The draft, which is currently being negotiated, reflects the priorities that will ensure that LDCs achieve the SDGs and beyond. It proposes a package of support measures for graduated countries to ensure that graduation is both sustainable and irreversible. In addition, the draft calls on development partners to meet their commitments in the respect of ODA, trade, debt relief, investment and technology transfer, and proposes additional support measures and initiatives.

I commend the Chair of the LDCs and other members of the Group for their tireless efforts in presenting a comprehensive document. Let me also acknowledge the efficient and dynamic stewardship of the Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee, Ambassador Rabab Fatima of Bangladesh and Ambassador Bob Rae of Canada, for efficiently leading the negotiations of the outcome of the LDC5; a process that is still underway. My Office has been supporting the process and will continue to do so in the days and months ahead.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the exception of the meeting of the LDC Future Forum, we will have concluded all the preparatory meetings by the end of this review meeting. However, there are various global processes slated to be held from now until January 2022, such as UNCTAD 15, COP 26 and the UN Food Systems Summit that will provide valuable opportunities to build momentum towards LDC5.

Allow me now to provide a brief overview of the involvement of various stakeholders in the preparations for LDC5. They have been fully involved in the preparatory process and will remain engaged in the LDC5 implementation, follow-up and monitoring.

OHRLLS is organizing the first ever LDC Future Forum, which will take place in Helsinki from 5 to 7 October 2021. The Forum will bring together the academic community, policy makers and practitioners to engage in innovative thinking and new solutions on the challenges and make policy recommendations for LDCs for the next decade.

The Forum is being organized in collaboration with the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). And here let me thank the Government of Finland for generously supporting this event.

So far, out of a thousand research proposals, we have selected around 35 academic papers, which broadly capture various facets of the structural challenges and new and emerging issues that LDCs face in pursuing sustainable development.

My Office is also working with parliamentarians, CSOs, youth, private sector and South-South partners to fully engage them in the Conference and its preparatory processes. Several workstreams have already been identified for these stakeholder groups leading up to the Conference. They will engage in high-level meetings, exhibitions, and thematic discussions on the sidelines of the LDC5 Conference. Key outcomes of these various stakeholder tracks will include declarations, as well as announcements of tangible partnerships and initiatives in relation to the implementation of the new 10-year Doha Programme of Action.

My Office is working with creative and technology partners around the world to ensure that LDC5 is a future-facing conference. It will take advantage of the latest technologies to celebrate the cultures and hopes of the Least Developed Countries through digital projections and music, and will connect those on the outside to the proceedings inside. We are confident that delegates will leave LDC5 inspired and motivated, with the benefit of new networks, to do their part in the awesome task of delivering on the new Programme of Action.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

We are exceedingly grateful to the Government of Qatar, the host of the LDC5 conference. It is wholly capable and fully committed to making LDC5 a landmark event. My office is holding regular meetings with representatives of Qatar in its role as the Host Country and I can assure you that we are on track in relation to our preparations.

I am also grateful to Canada and Turkey for their generous financial support for the preparations.

In closing, Excellencies, I encourage all member States to ensure participation in the LDC5 Conference, from 23-27 January 2022, at the Heads of State or Government level. I also encourage high-level participation in the multiple processes leading-up to the Conference in Doha. Invitation letters from the UN Secretary-General and the host country will be transmitted

shortly. I also encourage Member States and other stakeholders to announce new and enhanced partnership initiatives and deliverables for LDCs at the LDC5 Conference, which would support the implementation of the new programme of action.

I thank you for your attention.