



**Statement
By
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for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

Ambassadorial Retreat of LDCs and friends of LDCs

Opening Remarks

Tarrytown Estate, NY

21 October 2021

Excellencies,

Let me start by saying what this retreat is not.

This is not intended to be a de facto negotiation forum.

That's not our role and moreover we already have a negotiating venue and process underway, ably steered by Ambassadors Fatima and Rae, who have done a commendable job thus far.

Having done my fair share of facilitating negotiation processes, I can say that it is not an easy task to pilot negotiations on a draft that is almost 60 pages in length.

Now let me say a bit about what we hope to achieve over the course of this evening and tomorrow.

And I include this evening, even though some of you may feel that the real work doesn't begin till tomorrow.

And that's because us meeting in a more relaxed and informal setting like this provides, first and foremost, an opportunity for you to engage personally with your colleagues.

I know that it cannot be easy to undertake negotiations remotely via video-conference, as you have been doing.

Also, this provides us with an ideal opportunity to - in some cases - get to meet colleagues face to face for the first time.

Additionally, and importantly, as seasoned diplomats you don't need me to tell you how important and valuable it is to create space for off the record informal exchanges on the issues on our agenda.

We have created a programme that will complement such exchanges and facilitate rich interactions outside of the meeting room.

There are some significant headline proposals that were included by the LDCs in the zero draft of the DPoA, which I feel bear further explanation. And so, we hope to increase the level of understanding of how some of these initiatives could be structured and operate.

To help us in doing so, we have secured presenters, from within and outside the UN system, that can spark interactive discussion.

Discussion that will hopefully lead to an increased understanding of some of the key elements in the Rev.1 Outcome Document.

One such proposal is in the area of education, and so at our first session tomorrow we will hear presentations on **Education for STEM Graduates**.

This is expected to stimulate discussion that touches on the proposal to establish an online university for LDCs.

Similarly, **Session 4 on Trade and Investment** will see presentations that are relevant to the proposal to extend the transition period for graduated LDCs under the TRIPS Agreement, as well as the aspects of the Outcome Document related to Aid for Trade. This Session will also be relevant to the concrete proposal to establish an International Investment Support Center.

Colleagues,

I want to close by asking you a question.

Where were you ten years ago?

For my part, ten years ago I was serving as Jamaica's representative in Beijing.

And like everyone here I'd never heard the word "Covid".

So, I would have been amazed to learn that in 2021, I would be having the opportunity to address you here today - in the build-up to a make-or-break moment for the world's most vulnerable countries.

But here we all are.

With the historic opportunity to shape something meaningful, something lasting, something transformational for the 1.1 billion people that live in Least Developed Countries.

I know that **none of us**, in ten years' time, will want to look back and think "we could have done more".

This is a once in a decade opportunity for the Least Developed Countries.

We have seen over the last two years that girls in many LDCs unable to access schooling for even a month, are unlikely ever to return.

This is in the context of some LDCs having lost 90% of their school days.

So, yes this is indeed a once in a decade opportunity for nation states - with the risk of losing a *lifetime of opportunities* for the girls and boys living in these countries.

Why place such emphasis on what is at stake?

Because sometimes when there are divergent views, we can lose sight of the end goal we are working towards.

And I want us all to stay clear sighted about that over the next two days.

Remember we're not just negotiating an outcome document.

We're negotiating the outcomes themselves - as measured in people's lives and well-being.

We must have confidence that when we look back in 2032, we can declare that the Doha Programme of Action delivered lasting, sustainable change.

- That more girls were in school.
- Economies were transformed.
- The digital divide was bridged.
- And that a record number of LDCs graduated out of the category.

I look forward to working with you all over the coming days.

Thank you very much for your attention.