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*African Regional Review Meeting in Preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries*

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Your Excellency Vice President of Malawi,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank the Government of Malawi, the UN Office of the High Representative for the LDCs and the UN Economic Commission for Africa for organizing the Africa Regional Review and for inviting the Civil Society to share its perspective *on the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action in Preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries*.

The main goal of the Istanbul Program of Action was to enable half of the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020. This was not achieved. Only three African countries – Botswana, Cabo Verde, and Equatorial Guinea - have graduated from the least developed country status so far. Angola and Sao Tome e Principe are scheduled to graduate in 2024. And a few more African LDCs are getting closer and closer to that ambitious goal.

But we don't deny it, great progress has been made in some priority areas, despite the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has posed a great challenge for the future graduation prospects of least developed countries, as containment and lockdown measures in response to the crisis have resulted in a slowdown in global economic activity and recessions in several countries.

So briefly, you will agree with me that, in all LDCs in Africa there is a need to solve this health issue, security issues, to improve access to education, productive employment, and decent work, which are central planks of the SDGs. Especially critical is the need to generate jobs and opportunities for young people and women, which will have a big bearing on whether societies are peaceful and inclusive;

There are many gaps to fill in infrastructure, transport, access to energy, and information and communications technologies (ICTs) which continue to hold back the development of productive and trade capacities in LDCs in Africa.

There is also climate change, which poses a major challenge for LDCs. And as you know, LDCs have the least capacity, financial and otherwise, to deal with the consequences of climate change.

The civil society suggests the matters requiring attention:

For LDCs in Africa, tackling economic, social and environmental challenges, LDCs must:

- Apply all lessons learned from the implementation of the IPoA and national experiences of successful implementation of the MDGs, including: Give more importance to the integration of global development agendas into national and subnational strategies and

budgets. This would promote policy coherence, open up more opportunities for partnership, prioritize scarce resources, and establish strong national ownership.

- Identify all obstacles, because If obstacles are identified and then systematically addressed with precision, progress can be intensified very quickly. And to achieve this, it is very important that the LDCs in Africa multiply open debates on development in parliaments, let civil society and dynamic media free to do their work, as they are key elements in the process of identifying problems.

To development partners, it is important that they support the hard work of capacity building. And help in the development of good policies and action programs and also support in the execution.

Excellencies,

I hope you will find some of these ideas useful for the discussion in this African regional review meeting.

Thank you for your attention.