

Annual Ministerial Meeting of the LDCs 17/9/2020 (virtual meeting)

Statement -Belgium

Leave no one behind. 4 words that capture the essence of what the agenda 2030 and the SDGs is all about. 4 words, equally, to summarize the way Belgium has been going about its implementation, centred around an inclusive, participatory and rights-based approach to development.

Belgium has long concluded that in this SDG era, our development cooperation efforts should be concentrated first and foremost with those countries furthest left behind. That is why in 2014 already we pledged to spend at least half of our ODA in LDCs and fragile states. And that is also why 12 of the 14 partners of our development cooperation are LDCs.

Also in the **intergovernmental arena**, both here in NY and elsewhere, Belgium continues to stand by the LDCs, and we are very happy to continue our role as co-chair of the group of friends of the LDCs.

Efforts to achieve the goals of the Istanbul Programme of Action and those of Agenda 2030 are mutually supportive. Yet, both also share a similar assessment: despite progress, significant gaps do persist between the goals set out and the results achieved on the ground. And the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic is already reversing the development gains of previous years, with the poorest and most vulnerable being hardest hit.

LDCs are indeed bearing a major brunt of the COVID consequences. Belgium, therefore, remains committed to its policy choice to primarily focus its development efforts on LDCs in Africa.

Over the past months, we have endeavoured to make as much use of our development cooperation as possible for helping vulnerable countries in their battle against COVID-19.

We have increased our humanitarian budget with 22m Euros in order to tackle the coronavirus in humanitarian crises, and we have been organising flights to send emergency humanitarian equipment to countries in need.

We have adjusted our health programmes in order to support several of our partner countries during the Corona crisis, focusing on supporting the development of resilient, robust and effective public health systems.

And we are working together with our partners from the EU, UN and the IFIs in their efforts to assist LDCs in addressing the longer-term socio-economic consequences of the current crisis. We are particularly concerned about the profound disruption of the economy and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of women and girls. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, private sector development, good governance, education and food security will continue to be key thematic axes of our work.

The past months have made it abundantly clear how closely interconnected the world has become. Global cooperation is essential if we are to overcome the structural challenges faced by the Least Developed Countries. The upcoming LDC-V conference is indeed the opportunity to renew the partnership between the LDCs and their development partners by charting a course towards a smart recovery and sustainable development.