

STATEMENT

**European Union to the United
Nations**

**at the Annual Ministerial Meeting
of the Least Developed Countries**

New York, 17 September 2020

Your Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

[Our Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Jutta Urpilainen would have liked to be with us today, but had a last minute impediment] I [therefore] have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union.

This is the first Ministerial Meeting of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) held at the margins of UNGA in a virtual format. COVID-19 is impacting heavily on our lives and the lives of all people around the globe. It has exposed our vulnerabilities and it has dominated the work of the United Nations for the better part of this year.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of the 2030 Agenda, of the Paris Agreement and of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs, the 47 countries which count to the vulnerable members of the international community, home to 900 million people, half of which live below the poverty line.

The **COVID-19 Omnibus Resolution** adopted by the General Assembly last week recognizes with deep concern for the special challenges faced by the most vulnerable countries, including the LDCs, and calls for

special support in the areas of aid, capacity building, and aid for trade.

The European Union has stepped up to help **combat the impact of COVID-19** in our partner countries. This includes a Team Europe financial package from the European Commission, Member States, and European financial Institutions. In that context, the financial support to Least Developed Countries to tackle the consequences of the pandemic to-date from the European Commission alone amounts to EUR 2.4 billion, aiming to generate sustainable investment, green jobs and protect livelihoods.

Furthermore the European Union launched a Vaccines Initiative together with a Pledging Conference, contributes to appeals by the UN Secretary General, and engages in multilateral initiatives, such as on debt relief. In the context of “Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and beyond”, we co-chair the work on “**Recovering better for sustainability**”, which means that the post-COVID-19 world has to be greener, more inclusive, more just and more gender-equal.

This requires and deserves a determined effort from all of us. As their main trading and development partner, the European Union has the interests of Least Developed Countries very much at the heart in all these endeavours.

EU ODA for Least Developed Countries amounted to EUR 19.8 billion in 2018, thereby increasing for the second consecutive year and representing 0.125 per cent of our Gross National Income¹. But we aim even higher and remain committed to meet our collective short-term and long-term targets.

Beyond ODA, the EU is helping partner countries to unlock the full potential of all financial resources, domestic and external. **Integrated National Financing Frameworks** (INFFs) are important instruments in this respect, to which the EU lends its support, including through the UN Joint SDG Fund. This is particularly important with respect to the financing of the recovery response to COVID-19. We are encouraged

¹ See press release https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_674. Detailed final data for 2019 to be published by the OECD in December 2020.

that **already 24 LDCs have started to apply these frameworks²**.

On trade, the **European Union’s Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme** grants full duty free and quota free access to the EU Single Market for all products originating from Least Developed Countries (except arms and armaments). Overall imports from benefitting countries increased 9.9% between 2016-18, reaching almost EUR 40 billion in 2018. It is reassuring, that evaluations have demonstrated the positive effect of EBA on employment creation, including for women and young people.

In addition to trade preferences, the EU supports partner countries through an **“Aid for Trade”** programme which includes a **specific commitment to LDCs**. reflected in EUR 3 billion financial support for this area in 2018³.

² Bangladesh, Burkina-Faso, Rwanda, Senegal and Timor-Leste, Uganda, Benin, Bhutan, Burundi, Cambodia, Comoros, Congo DR, Djibouti, Haiti, Laos, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Nepal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo, Zambia.

³ Latest available OECD figures are for 2018.

Before COVID-19 arrived, the world was not fully on track with reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, but we have seen significant and unprecedented reduction in poverty, which also led to the **graduation of a number of LDCs**, an important step towards the Istanbul programme's aim to graduate half of the members of the group.

The **European Union's supports a smooth transition** from the LDC status – including by extending our trade preferences to countries for **three years after graduation**.

Eventually, we would like to see all Least Developed Countries graduate from this category. However, as **three out of four LDCs are affected by fragility and conflict**, their development achievements are at risk of being wiped out by recurrent conflicts. This highlights the need for conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity including in programming of development partner assistance programmes. To that end, the European Union is in addition to development cooperation, also supporting mediation

efforts, including in ten Least Developed Countries.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the European Union's **commitment to accompany the Least Developed Countries** towards recovering better and greener from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Paris Agreement. In that spirit we look forward to engaging in the preparations of the fifth programme of Action for Least Developed Countries in the coming year.

Thank you very much.