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Welcome Remarks

by

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**Under-Secretary-General and High Representative
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

at the

**First Meeting of the Small States Advocacy Champions
Washington D.C.**

14 April 2023

8:00hrs – 10:00hrs EST

Thank you, Madam Secretary-General.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

A very good morning to you all.

I join the Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, in welcoming you to this first meeting of the Commonwealth Small States Advocacy Champions.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Commonwealth Small States Advocacy Champions for taking on this important responsibility to enhance global partnership and collective actions to address the vulnerabilities of small states and support them in their pursuit of achieving the SDGs.

This initiative is very timely. I am particularly pleased to see that the Champions constitute the powerful voices of the small States and their development partners.

It goes without saying that the small States are bearing the heaviest brunt of the ongoing global crises. The complex and overlapping nature of their challenges have further increased their vulnerabilities and put their sustainable development progress to serious jeopardy.

More than ever before, we need strong solidarity and partnership to help the small States overcome these crises, build resilience, and set strongly on course to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Together with you, Madam Secretary-General, I am happy to work alongside our Advocacy Champions in this joint endeavor, especially now when we are in the final decade of action for the SDGs implementation.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

My Office is honored to support the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Together, they make up 90 of the most vulnerable member states of the UN.

All but 4 of the 33 Commonwealth Small States belong to one of these three groups.

Obviously, the approaches of the UN and the Commonwealth have important complementarity in their concepts and approaches to deal with the most vulnerable countries. And that's where the priorities of the UN and the Commonwealth converge very strongly.

Just last month, we have seen the successful holding of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, where my office and the Commonwealth organized a number of important events.

At the Conference, there was indeed a spirit of renewed political commitment, and enhanced solidarity to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Doha Programme of Action – the DPOA, a new generation of global partnership for the LDCs to help them overcome their structural challenges and accelerate their progress towards achieving the SDGs, and their sustainable and irreversible graduation.

My Office is committed to building on the momentum created by the Conference and to translating that into concrete actions and results on the ground.

We are also committed to building momentum toward a new generation of global partnerships for the LLDCs and SIDS.

Both the Third United Nations Conference on the Landlocked Developing Countries and the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States will take place in 2024, in Kigali, Rwanda and St. John's, Antigua & Barbuda, respectively.

The preparatory processes for both Conferences are underway, and my Office is working to ensure the widest possible coalition of support for these countries.

This will indeed be necessary to achieve ambitious and forward-looking programmes of action for both the LLDCs and SIDS for the next decade.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

We are passing through a very critical moment in the trajectory of global partnership for development.

This year marks the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

During the UN General Assembly high-level week in September this year, Heads of State and Government will gather in New York for the SDG Summit, where they will review the progress and gaps in implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will be followed by the Summit of the Future in 2024.

We need to take a comprehensive and synergistic approach for these two landmark events, along with the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework, and the Addis

Ababa Action Agenda to make maximum impact on the ground.

I wish to stress here that the success or failure of these upcoming summits and particularly our global commitments for advancing a just and equitable global development agenda, rest on our ability to address the challenges of the LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and other small countries. We cannot be successful on SDGs, climate action, DRR or FFD by leaving the people of the most vulnerable countries behind.

The task, ahead, however, is daunting. The small States have their unique vulnerabilities due to their inherent structural and geographical constraints.

And now, these countries are the worst victims of the impacts of the ongoing global crises.

Yet this is where, I believe, we have the most opportunities to turn the tide to the right direction. And that's where the role of the Advocacy Champions is most important and relevant.

This is indeed our opportunity to put the spotlight not only on the vulnerabilities and challenges of these countries but also to create necessary impetus and renewed commitment to mobilize enhanced resources and partnerships for them.

Excellencies,

On economic vulnerability, access to finance and debt sustainability, my Office is coordinating efforts to respond to the call by the United Nations General Assembly to provide recommendations on the

development of a multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) for SIDS.

The MVI should provide small States the opportunity for better access to concessional finance based on their structural vulnerabilities.

As you are aware, the President of the UN General Assembly appointed a High-Level Panel on the MVI in 2022.

The Panel members are in the final stage of their work, which is expected to conclude within the coming days. Further consultations with Member States and other stakeholders will then commence.

The aim of these consultations will be to bring us closer to an agreement on an MVI which can be adopted and operationalized.

The final report of the Panel is expected to be published in June 2023.

It is expected that an MVI which enjoys broad political consensus will be an important enabler for addressing many of the challenges that small States face.

We also recognize the important contribution of the Commonwealth's UVI, the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) and the Bridgetown Initiative to this effort.

My Office is committed to working toward this political consensus, and to supporting small States in their efforts to mobilize and use financial resources for their sustainable development.

Distinguished Colleagues,

On climate, my Office remains deeply engaged with all stakeholders in raising global ambition for mitigation, adaptation, resilience building, and climate financing.

We have been supporting the Alliance of Small Island State (AOSIS) on its call for a new “Loss and Damage” Fund for Vulnerable Countries. We are very pleased to see that the efforts culminated in the breakthrough agreement at COP27. The issue of climate justice will continue to remain at the heart of our advocacy efforts,

especially now to operationalize the loss and damage fund.

On disaster risk reduction, as a member of the Secretary General's Advisory Panel on Early Warnings for All Initiative, I will be contributing to fulfill his ambitious vision that everyone on Earth will be protected by early warnings by 2027, especially by putting the spotlight on the small and vulnerable countries who are often on the frontline of disasters and climate crises.

As we advance these priorities, my Office, together with the Commonwealth Secretariat, looks forward to working along with the Advocacy Champions that have so graciously offered their efforts in this regard.

Thank you, Madam Secretary General, and your team once again for engaging with us to carry this initiative forward. During these challenging times, it is important

that we expand our partnership in depth and dimensions with all stakeholders to provide coherent and enhanced support to small states.

I am very pleased to see the commitment of our Advocacy Champions. I look forward to working with all of you on a concrete plan of action to advance key messages to influence the global opinion and the development agenda.

I shall rest it here. I thank you for your kind attention.