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**United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least  
Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small  
Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)**

**Statement**

**Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu**

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

Virtual **Ministerial Meeting of LDCs**

**17 September 2020, 9:00am – 1:00 pm**

HE. Eisenhower Mkaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malawi and the Chair of the Group of LDCs

HE Mr Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly

HE Ms Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General

HE Mr Munir Akram, President of the ECOSOC

Honourable Ministers from LDCs and the Friends of LDCs

HE Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhil, Minister of State of Qatar and the host of the LDC-V

Ms Karin Finkelston, Vice President of Partnerships, Communications & Outreach, IFC

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express my deep gratitude to you, Hon. Eisenhower Mkaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malawi, for your commitment to and leadership of the Group of LDCs.

In the same vein, I must thank you Ambassador Perks Ligoya and your team for inspiring and leading the work of the Group in New York.

Last but not least, I express my appreciation to the members of the Global Coordination Bureau and the entire membership of LDCs for their efforts in relentlessly advocating for the needs and shared interests of LDCs.

Excellencies,

When we met around this time a year ago, I doubt that anyone of us could have pictured the circumstances and settings in which we meet now.

Months after months have now elapsed where everybody, everywhere lives every day with the sense of the unknown, the unsettling and the uncertain.

By now, millions of people are out of formal and informal employment in LDCs.

Too many men, women and often young girls and boys do not enjoy any kind of safety net. Even the precarious safety net of remittances is broken and they must rely on what may be left to family and extended family.

We had already sounded the alarm prior to the pandemic given the precarious situations of the fiscal state in many countries.

By now, we see a constant, a daily struggle to meet just basic public health requirements. The risk that the few and limited social protection schemes may vanish altogether with ever increasing budget constraints is very real.

Export earnings are falling at a speed not witnessed before.

Export orders amounting to likely billions of dollars have been lost.

Remittances diminish rapidly.

The tourism sector has collapsed.

A global recession is reality by now and it can only exacerbate this already dire situation.

What we are faced with is having to manage a severe social, economic and institutional storm.

What we are faced with is to give people HOPE and not let people despair.

Without robust and far reaching global and regional responses, the people of the LDCs will be left further behind.

Countries urgently need special and fast action. If we do not act now, we compromise the achievement of the 2030 Agenda!

So, what is OHRLLS doing?

In an immediate response, we organized a series of virtual briefings such as on external debt, food security and agricultural development, broadband and digital access.

We actively contributed to the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

We facilitated the Deputy Secretary-General's dialogues with representatives of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS groups during April.

The Group of LDCs issued a statement on COVID-19 outlining their special challenges and needs to address the impacts of the pandemic and how to build back better.

The DSG assured all possible support of the United Nations system to address and to overcome the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of our advocacy role, OHRLLS set up a webpage on the impacts of COVID-19 on LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

We provide regular updates on the COVID-19 situation in these countries.

Excellencies,

We are at a turning point - a point we must seize.

As we almost reached the end point of the implementation period of the Istanbul Programme of Action, the report of the Secretary-General finds that the LDCs achieved some notable successes.

These pertain to access to electricity, ICT, safe water and sanitation.

Progress is also recorded in key indicators on poverty, health and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Furthermore, unprecedented progress has been achieved towards graduation, with 12 LDCs at various stages in this process.

As I often said, it is a picture of a glass half full. It is a picture prior to COVID 19.

Despite this progress, there is however no room for complacency.

We must be concerned that for many other goals and targets, progress had either stalled or been reversed.

And again, I talk about data we had PRIOR to the pandemic.

Already then, we could see how global poverty and malnutrition rates were on the rise.

Since, COVID-19 has pushed millions and millions of people back into extreme poverty and hunger.

It is somewhat of an understatement to say that this is truly challenging the scope to realize the SDG targets in these areas. This will have a serious domino effect on other socio-economic indicators.

Add to this that COVID 19 has not given any holiday to climate change ! Quite the opposite!

Climate change impacts are accelerating and escalating . We see ever more severe tropical storms, droughts and related events around the globe. This further compounds and seriously jeopardizes the development prospects of LDCs.

Now, building domestic capacity and resource mobilization is a MUST for LDCs. But this has to be complemented and accompanied by robust global partnerships.

This is our litmus test for multilateralism to prove its relevance and effectiveness.

The Fifth UN Conference on LDCs provides us with great opportunities and above all a powerful platform to build a renewed global compact in favour of the peoples of the LDCs.

We really must come TOGETHER and do all we can to ensure that we do not miss this opportunity.

Excellencies,

Earlier, I mentioned the DSG's commitment to bringing the full UN system capacities to deployment.

OHRLLS chairs the Inter-Agency Task Force on Graduation of LDCs (IATF) with the objective to provide strengthened and coordinated UN system-wide support to the countries graduating from the LDC category.

We have already organised joint UN missions to Sao Tome and Principe and Solomon Islands last year.

A virtual workshop was held in Laos just 2 weeks ago.

The IATF is supporting graduating countries in developing their smooth transition strategy.

The Secretary-General for his part repeatedly reiterated his full commitment to supporting the graduating countries, including through the IATF.

Excellencies,

Allow me to now update you on the preparations for the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs.

Needless to say, the entire timeframe had to be revisited.

Under the rescheduled timeframe, we are drawing a new calendar of preparatory events leading up to LDC-V. Our substantive preparations for the Conference are ongoing.

We already held several thematic meetings on COVID-19 as I mentioned earlier.

Several documents have been finalized or will be released shortly.

These include:

- the report of the Secretary-General on the 10-year implementation of the IPoA,
- the synthesis of national reports submitted by LDCs,
- a report on UN System Best Practices on Supporting the Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Overview and Analysis of Contributions from the Inter-agency Consultative Group on LDCs (IACG)”,
- support for the implementation of the IPoA, and
- the 2020 Policy brief on Advancing SDG7 in LDCs.

We continue our preparations for the Helsinki academic conference. The conference is now scheduled to take place from 12-14 May 2021.

Almost 1000 submissions with some fifty per cent from LDCs were received.

OHRLLS interacts with the entire United Nations System to rally support for LDC5.

The past three meetings of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on LDCs have discussed how different agencies can make contributions to the Conference and its preparatory processes.

This will continue up to the Conference and beyond to draw on the collective expertise and resources of the System as a whole in support of the LDCs.

A new dedicated website for the conference has already been launched and my hope is that the website will grow as the details of various events unfold.

Let us indeed seize the moment and work together to turn LDC5 into the most important moment in the international development calendar in 2022.

As part of the OHRLLS advocacy role, we foresee to engage with media globally. It is all about creating awareness, mobilizing support and build action consensus. The key audiences in favour of LDCs must be built in LDCs themselves as well as in partner countries and organizations.

So, this is a busy time, an intense moment but again a moment where we have to double effort and push ahead.

It is in this context, that I kindly once more must ask for the support of LDCs and the Friends of LDCs to the work of OHRLLS.

We need to strengthen capacity to continue to provide extended and targeted support to LDCs in enabling them to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Programme of Action in a coordinated and coherent manner.

As I said a year ago, we could see the glass half full.

Now I would say we must make every effort to first keep the glass half full and in doing so we must ensure our actions are driven by the ultimate goal: including the peoples of the LDCs into a sustainable path for their development.

The challenges for the LDCs have grown considerably this year and beyond. The need for support and assistance has thus grown considerably.

Just as COVID 19 knows no borders, gender, race, or religion , the challenges ahead of us require concerted, focused and action driven multi- lateral cooperation.

It will be of critical importance that we all come together and strengthen multilateral capacity to provide dedicated support to what is the most vulnerable group of countries and people.

We are in this together and it is indeed only together that we can lay the foundations for the future people want.

I thank you.