

ANNUAL MINISTERIAL MEETING OF LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCS)
Thursday, 17 September 2020
09:00-13:00hrs New York Time (1:00pm-5:00pm Freetown)

Mr. Chairman
The President of the General Assembly;
Colleague Ministers
Excellences
Excellency Madame Deputy Secretary General
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Government and People of Sierra Leone. At the outset let me join colleague Ministers in commending the Chair of the LDC Group of Ministers, our Colleague from Malawi, for convening this meeting.
2. In particular I want to applaud the Permanent Mission of Malawi to the United Nations for their inspirational leadership and for chairing the activities of the LDCs in New York.
3. The Government and People of Sierra Leone stands in solidarity with other members of the comity of nations in these challenging times and would like to express heartfelt and deep condolences to families that lost their loved ones to the COVID-19.
4. We salute the selfless devotion of healthcare providers and all frontline workers, working around the clock globally in response to this pandemic. We express profound gratitude for their service to humanity.
5. The fact that we are holding this meeting virtually speaks to the magnitude of the worst public health emergency in recent times. The impact of COVID -19 on LDCs will lead to debt unsustainability and serious economic crisis. As indicated in the report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the SDGs, COVID 19 will hit LDCs the hardest and make achieving national and global development targets a huge challenge.
6. Mr. Chairman, Sierra Leone, as an LDC, gives utmost importance to the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA). However, we face challenges in its implementation, starting with the Ebola outbreak in 2014, the drop in the prices of our primary exports, and now COVID-19. Be that as it may, Sierra Leone remains committed to the principles and ideals of the IPoA.
7. In line with our commitment, and to put the country in a proper trajectory to address its daunting challenges, Sierra Leone is continuing the implementation of its Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2029-2023) with a people centred and decentralised focus. This multi-sectoral MTNDP is aligned to the IPoA commitments, the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union Agenda 2063 and other internationally agreed agendas that reflect Sierra Leone's roadmap to growth and stability. We have completed the first year of implementation of our national plan, which demonstrates a strong political will and commitment to deliver on the promises amid the challenges.

8. Mr Chairman, LDCs in fragile situations require specific measures that address their specific contexts, especially in the post COVID-19 era. As Chair of the g7+, Sierra Leone is fully engaged in promoting peace building and state-building. We will use the recently acquired g7+ UN Observer Status to strengthen our advocacy work in favour of building peace and resilience and transforming our countries. It is imperative that the restriction necessitated by the COVID-19 does not threaten gains already made in conflict prevention, global peace and development, as reflected in the g7+ joint statement on COVID-19 pandemic, issued in April 2020.
9. We therefore underscore the importance of strengthening national health and social protection systems, to help ensure a sustainable recovery from COVID-19, as well as put mechanisms in place for early detection, prevention and response to future outbreaks.
10. COVID-19 has heightened the need for the UN system and the international community to commit to supporting countries in special situations, especially LDCs given our weak health systems, high levels of debt and limited fiscal space to manage the aftermath of the pandemic.
11. Distinguished delegates, critical to any return to normalcy and post pandemic recovery, is the availability and accessibility of vaccines to all who need them, but more especially for low income countries who are at the tail end of the global supply chain. As Chair of the g7+, Sierra Leone on behalf of the Group is supporting global efforts to make Covid-19 Vaccines a *Global Common Good*.
12. We acknowledge the support provided by the World Bank, the IMF, the G-20 and other major international organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). We note however, that the suspension only runs up to 2021. Given the unpredictability of the crisis, we call for an extension of this moratorium and ultimate consideration of debt cancellation for LDCs. LDCs need additional resources to cope and recover from this pandemic and the fiscal space and liquidity through budget support, extended credit facilities and debt cancellation.
13. In light of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, there is need to scale up the percentage of ODA given to the LDCs. In addition, there is need for significant progress in the establishment of the Investment Promotion Regime for LDCs. Let me underscore that LDCs need additional grants, access to finance and technical assistance from our development partners, as well as the private sector to alleviate the effect of this pandemic and to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.
14. We also need to focus on areas that require strengthening at both national and global levels so that the 5th United Nations conference will see more countries graduate from this group; as graduation is a key measure of success for the LDCs programme of action.
15. Mr Chairman, let me end by reiterating that the Government of Sierra Leone remains steadfastly committed to course of the LDCs and look forward to the successor programme.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION