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Statement

by

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High Representative

and

Under-Secretary- General

Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries

and Small Island Developing States

at

**the Opening Session of the Meeting of National Focal Points of
LDCs**

13 November 2019

Conference Room 11, 10:00 am – 10:30 am

Your Excellency, Ambassador Ligoya, Permanent Representative of Malawi and our Chair of the LDC Global Coordination Bureau,

Your Excellency, Ambassador Al Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN, representing the host country for LDC V Conference.

Your Excellency, Ambassador Hermann, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN and with us here representing the Friends of LDCs,

Dear National Focal Points,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now declare open our annual meeting of National Focal Points of LDCs.

I warmly welcome all of you to our house - the UN.

I must thank the Governments of Denmark and Norway for their continued support to the least developed countries and for funding our meeting.

I also must thank our colleagues from the UN for their active participation and contributions.

This year's meeting of National Focal Points of LDCs is of very special significance. We are gathering at a critical moment in the preparatory process of the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs.

Little over one year is left and we reach the conclusion of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

We now must take stock of progress as well as of failures in the implementation of the IPoA.

We have to look at best practices, take stock of lessons learned, and most important of all, let us be ahead of the curve. We must identify emerging challenges, new priorities and initiatives capable of anticipating what is ahead. We must look at what it will take to overcome constraints and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. 2030 is just a mere ten years away!

Since the adoption of the IPoA, I think we can say that we have a glass half full. LDCs have made notable progress in meeting the goals and targets of the IPoA.

They made great strides forward in their overall socio-economic development.

The key goal of the IPoA was to enable graduation and eradicate extreme poverty.

Extreme poverty in LDCs fell to 35.5 per cent in 2015. Enrolment in primary and secondary education in LDCs has more than doubled in 2017.

At present, 12 LDCs are at different stages of graduation with Vanuatu, Angola, Bhutan, Sao Tome and Principe and Solomon Islands to graduate before 2024.

Four LDCs have met the graduation criteria twice.

Access to electricity increased from 34 per cent in 2011 to 45 per cent in 2016. Mobile cellular subscriptions in LDCs rose from 33 per cent in 2010 to almost 70 per cent in 2017.

LDCs have also made progress in gender equality and empowerment of women.

Isn't it encouraging that some LDCs in Africa are among the world's top performers in terms of the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women!

So, this all is encouraging!

BUT - and there always is a but - many are far from the goals and targets of the IPoA such as achieving at least 7 per cent economic growth per annum.

Many remain far from 100 per cent access to the Internet by 2020.

Too many remain far from substantial and especially sustainable progress towards eradicating hunger, and doubling the share of their exports in global exports.

There undeniably is progress but progress is very uneven.

Given this uneven progress, we need to remain vigilant and above all very active because LDCs remain the most vulnerable group of countries. They remain the countries facing severe structural impediments to sustainable development and once more are at risk of being left behind.

In 2018, only seven LDCs achieved economic growth of 7 per cent or more while two experienced negative growth.

The current growth prospects of LDCs in our increasingly volatile if not unpredictable settings suggest that around 30 per cent of the LDC population will remain in extreme poverty by 2030.

We must be concerned that around 80 million people of LDCs are in food crisis. We must be concerned that the number of undernourished people increased by 32.7 million during the period from 2011 to 2017.

We must be more than concerned - we must be alarmed!

Also, only modest improvements have been made in enhancing productive capacity. Similarly and actually going hand in hand with limited productive capacity gains, we see very limited structural transformation. The share of the manufacturing sector remains basically stagnant in many LDCs.

Capacity and means for implementation of the IPoA goals continue to remain a major bottleneck for LDCs.

Government revenue in LDCs is stagnant at around 19 per cent. ODA to LDCs declined by 2.7 per cent in 2018. The share of FDI going to LDCs, is also less than 2 per cent of the world's total flows.

Bottom line, we see an increasing number of LDCs getting into debt distress or at high risk of debt distress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let there be no doubt, the LDCs and their peoples are at the highest risk of being left behind.

This very real risk is compounded by special and emerging challenges that they are faced with. The risks range from increasing inequality and the instabilities this triggers, climate change and related disasters, health pandemics, rising external debt, protracted conflicts, and uncertainty in the global trading system.

Since our meeting last year, OHRLLS has made the provision of tailored capacity building to LDCs a top priority. We did this through a country pilot project, thematic study, consolidated and coordinated support of the UN system to graduating countries, and substantive backstopping support to inter-governmental negotiations.

We also convened a global conference on financing sustainable energy in LDCs. The purpose was to identify solutions and build effective public-private partnerships.

The Malawi Sustainable Energy Investment Study was produced with an aim to boost capacity in attracting investment in sustainable energy and leapfrog to clean energy. This project has the potential to be replicated in other LDCs.

In collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union, we launched a report on the “Economic Impact of Broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS”. The aim is to assist these countries with implementation of policies to improve broadband access, connectivity so that they can participate effectively in the global economy.

The Inter-agency Taskforce on Graduation led by OHRLLS organized two workshops in Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands. Here our goal was to undertake country-specific diagnostic reviews of the impact of graduation, and deliver enhanced support to facilitate smooth transition of the two graduating LDCs.

It is continuous advocacy and substantive backstopping support to the LDC group which contributed to the decision by member states to hold the Fifth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Fifth UN Conference on LDCs will be held in Qatar in 2021, tentatively from 21-25 March.

The Conference will undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of the IPoA.

It will identify obstacles and constraints as well as actions needed to overcome them. It will also mobilize global support and enhance partnerships in support of LDCs.

A new programme of action for LDCs for the next decade that coincides with the remaining decade of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be adopted during the Conference.

This new programme of action will address emerging challenges and harness new opportunities and accelerate implementation of the SDGs by the LDCs.

National reports are key inputs to the LDC-V process. They will feed into regional reviews and global intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document of the Conference.

They will also ensure that the next programme of action is based on ground realities.

OHRLLS will prepare a synthesis report of national reports summarizing lessons learned from 10 years of implementing the IPoA.

I thank all countries that have submitted their national reports. At the same time, I strongly encourage those that are in the process of finalizing to submit their reports on time.

This inclusive preparatory process will also involve pre-conference events, thematic reviews and contributions from the UN system organizations, private sector, civil society organizations, academia, foundations and parliamentarians.

Our meeting is the beginning of your full participation and engagement throughout this very important process.

We count on your support and coordination! This is indispensable to the success of the LDC-V.

A very intense agenda is ahead of us. I look forward to hearing about your national experiences. I look forward to our discussions on how we can forge ahead together.

and I now wish your, our meeting a great success motivated by our shared concern not to fail the peoples of the LDCs!

Thank you.