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Remarks

By

Ms. Rabab Fatima,

Under-Secretary-General

High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,

Landlocked Developing Countries and

Small Island Developing States

Initial meeting of the revitalized

Group of Friends of LLDCs

23 November 2022, 9:00am-9:45am,

UN Secretariat,

Conference Room 11

Distinguished Co-Chairs - Amb. Alexander Marschik, Amb. Claver Gatete, Amb. Ruchira Khamboj, and Chair of the LLDC Group, Amb. Collen Kelapile.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues and Friends,

Let me begin by congratulating and commending you, Co-Chairs and LLDC Chair for organizing this very important meeting and for taking the lead in revitalizing the Group of Friends of LLDCs. I thank you, Co-Chairs, for having me join the meeting this morning, and I am delighted to see the Group reconvening again in such a strong way.

Having a development partner country, a transit country and the host of the next major LLDC Conference as co-chairs of the Group of Friends is a remarkable winning combination. And the participation of many partner countries and transit neighbors of LLDCs in the meeting today makes the Group of Friends complete and impactful.

The revitalization of this Group of Friends is very timely, especially now as we approach 2024, which will mark:

- **the end of the 10-year Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs;**
- and**
- **an opportunity for the international community to recommit its support to the LLDCs at the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs with a new programme of action.**

The support of this Group is crucial for two main reasons:

Firstly, as we have heard today, progress achieved over the past 8 years since the adoption of the Programme falls short of achieving the targets on all the priority areas.

Secondly, LLDCs are currently going through a critical time.

The pandemic, the climate crisis, and the ongoing geopolitical situation and conflicts have all taken their toll on LLDCs. Rising inflation, exorbitant shipping costs, supply chain disruptions and elevated food and fuel costs are all compounding LLDCs' trade- and transit-related vulnerabilities.

In a nutshell, things do not look good for the LLDCs.

Excellencies,

This is why the Secretary-General is placing great emphasis on the LLDCs' issues. He has given me clear instructions to raise the profile and visibility of the LLDCs, and he reemphasized that point during a recent meeting of the Senior Management Group.

I believe that in this context, this Group of Friends on LLDCs can play such a crucial role.

Not only critical in raising awareness and mobilizing support for the LLDCs to address their priorities and challenges, but it can also serve as a platform to strengthen international partnerships as we move towards the Third UN Conference on LLDCs in 2024.

The Third UN Conference, for which the modalities have been negotiated in the Second Committee, offers an important and timely opportunity to put the spotlight for enhanced international support for the LLDCs.

We hope that the Group will be strongly involved in the Conference itself and in its preparatory process that will take place at the national, regional and global levels.

On this note, my Office, in collaboration with partners, has already started implementing various preparatory activities. Those include, among others: a Ministerial Transport Conference of LLDCs [Turkmenistan, August 2022]; a session on the integration of LLDCs into the global trade during the WTO Public Forum [virtual, September 2022]; and an Expert Group Meeting on foreign investment for structural economic transformation in LLDCs [New Delhi, November 2022].

I was also at COP 27 two weeks ago, where my team, in collaboration with the Chair [the Government of Botswana] and other partners organized two high-level events- namely: one on strengthening climate action in LLDCs; and the other one on promoting resilience and sustainability of transport systems in LLDCs. And there were also other events where I highlighted the challenges of LLDCs.

All these initiatives, we believe, will feed into the preparatory processes of the 2024 Conference.

In the coming months, as we speed up preparations for the Conference, my Office will organize, and stand ready to support, additional pre-Conference activities on LLDC issues that require global attention. It will also support Rwanda as host of the Conference.

Excellencies,

My Office, and I, will be here to support this Group's work and mandate, not only towards the Third UN Conference, but beyond 2024 to ensure the full implementation of the Kigali Programme of Action.

I shall rest it here. I thank you.