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Adopting Declaration, political leaders, representatives reaffirm commitment to Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries

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Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, Plenary – 5th & 6th Meetings (AM & PM)

'NEED TO FOSTER PROGRESS ACROSS ALL SECTORS' UNDERLINED AT MIDTERM REVIEW

While the world's poorest 48 countries had made headway in reducing poverty and improving well-being, without "robust" support to help them diversify production bases, boost trade and protect hard-won gains from various external shocks, the aspirations of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 would not be realized, Heads of State and Government, and High Representatives agreed today, as they concluded the three-day Midterm Review of that 10-year framework.

"We reaffirm our **commitment** to the **full** effective and timely implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action," they stressed in a 26-page Political Declaration (document [A/CONF.228/L.1](#)) geared towards catalysing action within the new context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other recently agreed international accords.

While least developed countries (LDCs) had made significant efforts to achieve the Istanbul Programme of Action – especially in the areas of agriculture, human development and achieving peace – there remained "a need to foster progress across all sectors", the Declaration states, adopted as orally revised, both by those countries and their partners.

The Istanbul Programme of Action, adopted in 2011, covers eight priority areas: productive capacity; agriculture, nutrition and rural development; trade; commodities; human and social development; multiple crises and emerging challenges; financial resources; and good governance. Amid mixed reviews on its implementation, Governments pledged to tackle the institutional and capacity constraints that had hampered greater – and more sustainable – prosperity. In such efforts, national ownership was essential.

Strengthening global partnerships and supporting strong national leadership and ownership would assist almost 1 billion people living in vulnerable countries as they worked towards a bright and productive future, said Gyan Chandra Acharya, United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. Moving forward, it would be important to build solid links between the Programme of Action and global development frameworks in order to accelerate progress in the next five years for least developed countries and sustainable development for all.

Through the Declaration, Governments made recommendations across 14 areas, perhaps most notably around financing. Official development assistance (ODA) providers reaffirmed commitments, including to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) to ODA, and between 0.15 and 2 per cent specifically to least developed countries. To help least developed countries mobilize domestic resources, they committed to help broaden tax bases, enhance revenue administration and reduce corruption. Debt situations must be vigilantly monitored and problems addressed, where appropriate.

During the past five years, the Declaration stated, limited progress had been made in diversification and value addition. The situation required strategic policy interventions at the subnational, national, regional and global level. In terms of market access, Governments reaffirmed their commitment to "significantly increase" poor countries' share in global trade, pledging to increase "Aid for Trade" support. Least developed countries were encouraged to mainstream trade into national development plans.

To foster investment promotion, they welcomed the decision of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to include "investment promotion regimes" for the least developed countries, inviting the United Nations Secretary-General to adopt that issue in the agenda of the System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to enhance the ability of poor countries to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). They also recommended that least developed countries establish regulatory and policy frameworks that allowed businesses to innovate, invest and transform technology into employment.

On the issue of technology, Governments reaffirmed their commitment to operationalize the technology bank for least developed countries. In that context, they took note of a 2015 General Assembly resolution outlining steps necessary for its launch by 2017, pledging to promote synergies with the Technology Facilitation Mechanism established in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. They invited the bank's governing council to draft a legal charter to be adopted by the Assembly by the end of 2016.

The ability to withstand and recover from external shocks was critical. With that in mind, Governments decided to carry out an analysis on crisis mitigation and building resilience for least development countries at the national and international levels, requesting the General Assembly to determine the parameters at its seventy-first session. They expressed their commitment to take early action to prevent armed conflict by strengthening core governance institutions, among other things, and called for more effective delivery on climate change commitments.

As for the United Nations, wider recognition of LDC status could facilitate better integration of the Programme of Action into the system's development policies. The Committee for Development Policy was invited to look into why that category had not been applied by some bodies and to include its findings in its annual report to the Economic and Social Council.

More broadly, the Declaration recommitted Governments to "broadening and strengthening" the participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making. Those and "more concerted and ambitious" efforts would enable half of the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020.

Also during the closing plenary, participants adopted the report of the Midterm Review (document [A/CONF.228/L.3](#)), introduced by the representative of Nepal as Rapporteur, which also included a resolution expressing thanks to the people and Government of Turkey (document [A/CONF.228/L.2](#)), presented separately by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China.

Representatives of Bangladesh, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Belgium presented summaries of the four high-level round tables held during the Midterm Review on the themes of, respectively, "Productive capacity, agriculture, food security and rural development"; "Trade and commodities, economic diversification and graduation"; "Human and social development and good governance at all levels"; and "Multiple crises and other emerging challenges, mobilizing financial resources for development and capacity-building".

The representative of Mali presented a summary of the parliamentary parallel event, and a representative of LDC Watch also spoke.

Delivering statements during the general exchange of views earlier in the day was a representative of Bahrain, as well as officials from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN-Women) and the United Nations Tourism Organization.

Statements

EBRAHIM YUSUF AL-ABDULLAH (Bahrain) said national efforts of the least developed countries needed to be supported by the international community. That required action at the international level to help them cope with challenges, including climate change, food security and conflict. Obtaining assistance alone was not enough, its effective use was critical. Investments in education and training were essential for socioeconomic and political progress and would also have deep impacts on developing human capital. Bolstering administrative capacities was another key to development. That action should include reform, with least developed countries adopting clear-cut, creative policies to activate productive development. Other critical areas requiring investments included youth, to build social, economic and cultural pillars of societies, and industry and tourism, to develop a robust economy. Least developed countries needed international support to prevent them from being left behind.

KIFLE SHENKORU of the [World Intellectual Property Organization](#) (WIPO) said the Programme of Action had been integrated into his organization's work plan and was currently being implemented broadly. Citing examples of ongoing work, he said training sessions had reached people in least developed countries worldwide, including skills development in information and communications technology tools. WIPO had also established technology centres in 18 least developed countries to facilitate access to technological information for wealth creation and employment generation.

GARY FOWLER of the [International Telecommunication Union](#) (ITU) said the Programme of Action had been the first instrument to recognize the importance of information and communications technology as essential catalysts for sustainable digital development. Although one could not eat a mobile phone, in 2016, connectivity was a basic tool of empowerment, not only as a lifeline to family and friends, but for tapping into needed information to create the necessary knowledge to make wise decisions to control one's future. Recalling that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contained a target specifically to provide universal and affordable internet access in least developed countries by 2020, he underlined that success depended on private-sector partnerships. While significant gains had seen prices drop worldwide for mobile broadband, gaps in access remained, which must be addressed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Providing a range of examples of how ITU member States were contributing to least developed countries' efforts, he said an overall strategy, "Connect 2020", aimed at information and communications technology growth, inclusiveness, sustainability, innovation and partnership. ITU had also provided guidance on how best to create an enabling policy and regulatory environment to attract the private sector and mainstream the needs of least developed countries. "We believe that if everyone in the least developed countries had an affordable point of connectivity to our knowledge society and the basic digital literacy skills to use that connectivity – we will see a burst of innovation that we can't even imagine," he said. "A mobile phone may never replace food and water as a necessity of life, but it can 'reboot' our humanity and provide a key tool to empower the least developed countries to 'leap frog' many of the hurdles they face in creating their own sustainable future."

CHARLES KERWIN of the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) commended the draft political declaration for its attention paid to the well-being of migrants, as they played a role in economic development in least developed countries. Migration should be seen as a means to mitigate climate change and boost growth, and international trade and migration were entwined. While much greater South-South cooperation had been seen on the former, attention to the latter was needed, including loosening border controls and facilitating immigration. The consequences of restrictive migration policies could be seen in a rise of illegal migration, with illicit networks of criminals charging migrants who sought a better future. Regulated borders and well-managed policies would prevent risking the lives of migrants, he said. Lowering remittances among least developed countries would also benefit them, and managed migration would, indeed, benefit all, he concluded.

CHRISTINE BRAUTIGAM of the [United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#) (UN-Women) said that, while no country had achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the least developed countries must pay close attention to ensure those gains were made. She welcomed the recognition of the role of women in agricultural rural development, good governance and migration, among other areas. For its part, UN-Women was working with partners to address challenges and help least developed countries overcome obstacles with a view to benefiting women and girls. Projects focused on issues such as women's leadership in peace and security, their full participation in political and civil life and gender equality. UN-Women also worked with Governments on projects to promote empowerment and combat violence against women and girls. Also with the Programme of Action, UN-Women stood ready to help least developed countries in their quest to achieve those objectives alongside the Sustainable Development Goals.

ZORITSA UROSEVIC of the [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#) said all 17 Sustainable Development Goals could benefit from well-managed tourism. The continued growth of the sector should indeed benefit people and the planet. Sustainable tourism was promoted as a driver for economic growth and environmental sustainability, she said, adding that her organization had helped industry to strive towards those goals. Tourism now provided 1 out of every 11 jobs in the world, ranking ahead of food and automotive products, and in 2015, 1.2 billion tourists had travelled worldwide. Turning to the least developed countries' share of those revenues, she said 44 of 48 of them had identified tourism as a prime sector to develop. For its part, her organization had launched a road map and strategies that aimed at, among other things, poverty eradication, policy formulation and national capacity-building. Unlocking tourism's potential depended on including it in national strategies, she said, underlining that developing countries could benefit from trade policies to enhance tourism, including "Aid for Trade" schemes for the sector.

 Draft Political Declaration Submitted by the President (A/CONF.228/L.1) [En] [Fr] [Ar] [S] [Ch] [Ru]



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