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United Nations

Special Address

by

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and

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**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
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at the

Opening Plenary Session

of the

**Meeting on the establishment of the
Global South Development Forum**

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It is a great pleasure to return to this wonderful city, almost a year since we converged here in December last year for a meeting that is of direct relevance to this gathering. It was the Symposium on the Creative Economy focusing on the South. The city of Shanghai is fast becoming the vanguard of south-south cooperation, and fittingly so, as its social, economic and cultural vibrancy epitomizes the resourcefulness of the citizens of the South.

Like today's meeting, the Symposium on the Creative Economy was inspired and organized by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation. It focused on identifying new opportunities for development in the South. Today's meeting is built on and benefits from the outcomes of the series of recent meetings, forums and conferences dealing with various dimensions of South-South cooperation, as it seeks to put in place an appropriate institutional structure for not only generating and harnessing new ideas, but also maximizing the impact of South-South cooperation on the lives of the people on the ground.

I commend the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, under the able and enthusiastic stewardship of my dear colleague Yiping Zhou, for these bold initiatives. I thank Dr. Zhao Yongli, Director of South-South Division, Ministry of Commerce of China; Mr. Kalman Mizsei, Assistant Secretary-General and Assistant Administrator of the UNDP and Mr. Ramesh Thakur, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Rector of the United Nations University for their participation at this Forum and for their support to these initiatives.

In two months time, on 19 December, we shall, for the second time, mark the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation. This meeting which is aimed at assuming a ground-breaking role for the proposed Global South Development Forum (GSDF) and the Southern Leaders' Round Table (SLRT) is, therefore, taking place at an opportune time. A positive outcome of this objective will give us a significant, concrete milestone in the advancement of the South-South agenda as we observe that important day.

Last year's Second South Summit in Doha advanced the agenda of the South-South cooperation in a big way highlighting that its untapped opportunities remain vast and wide-ranging. The Summit deliberations also recognized that the challenge is putting in place the needed policy and institutional frameworks, as well infrastructure, to exploit these opportunities to the full. This context gives our meeting a very special significance and also a responsibility. The envisaged Global South Development Forum will be an important forum for development actors from the South – governments, the private sector, civil society, the academia, the media and other players – to share and articulate policy options for the socio-economic development of the South in the context of a fast-changing global economy. For the first time, policy makers and opinion leaders across the societal spectrum of the South would have a regular, shared platform for addressing both entrenched and emerging development challenges. Such a forum has the potential of not only helping countries of the South navigate their way through the maze of the complex and increasingly globalizing economy, but also playing their rightful role in shaping that process for their benefit. It would also serve as an important tool for forging, consolidating and advancing partnerships at various levels for the development of the South. Through broader participation and wide-ranging consultations, the GSDF has the potential of serving as “a model of inclusive multilateralism for the international community as a whole”.

I believe that a structure such as the Global South Development Forum is particularly valuable in the context of the rapidly growing importance of South-South cooperation. A good number of developing countries have become major economic players in the world, emerging as important markets, investors and providers of technical assistance and financial aid to fellow developing countries. Be it in health, education, population, rural development, the arts and artefacts, agriculture or modern technology, many developing countries have acquired capacities that rival those of the developed world. In many cases, such

knowledge, expertise and technology is more appropriate to the needs of other developing countries, as their socio-economic conditions are comparable. It is also more affordable. As a result, many developing countries are increasingly looking southwards to advance their development objectives.

Developing countries have a broad range of areas to act on, from investment and infrastructure to the sharing of technological advances and best practices in development. In many cases, the best lessons in tackling development challenges can only be learnt from other developing countries. This has been the case, for example, with regard to HIV/AIDS. By sharing experiences with the more successful ones among them, many developing countries are beginning to turn the corner in their fight against HIV/AIDS. Microcredit is another uniquely South initiative that has transformed the lives of millions of the poorest across the South. Only a few days ago, Bangladesh's Grameen Bank and its founder, Professor Muhammad Yunus, who is credited with initiating the microcredit programme in a Least Developed Country, won the Nobel Peace Prize. Similar achievements can be made in the areas of food security, science and technology, environment, education, population and health where developing countries share many characteristics.

South-South cooperation has become important in the area of trade, which is recognized as the engine of economic growth. Trade between developing countries continues to increase rapidly, with more than 40 per cent of developing-country exports now going to other developing countries. This is a major contribution to growth and development in some of the world's poorest countries. In this regard, the commendable initiative to expand trade within the South through the Global System of Trade Preferences Among Developing Countries (GSTP) needs be strengthened. Also commendable are the offers of duty-free, quota-free markets access by countries of the South to the products of the Least Developed Countries. At the same time, reality is that the trade barriers among countries of the South are higher than those of the North.

South-South cooperation is of particular relevance to the three most vulnerable groups of countries -- the Least Developed, the Landlocked and the Small Islands, as it greatly expands the development opportunities of these countries that add up to 90 and face more daunting challenges than the other developing countries. Their universally-recognized structural, economic, social, environmental and institutional vulnerability make these countries the most deserving of the benefits that are surely to result in the renewed efforts to expand South-South cooperation. The importance of South-South cooperation to these countries is recognized in their respective UN-endorsed action plans – the Brussels Programme for LDCs, the Almaty Programme for Landlocked Developing Countries and the Mauritius Strategy for Small Island Developing States. A global alliance in their support would be a truly resolute step that the international community could take to give real meaning to development cooperation.

It is important to tie the South-South agenda with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals which are, first and foremost, an internationally agreed package for the poor. After all, the objective of South-South cooperation continues to be to ensure a better quality of life for the world's poorest. The Millennium Development Goals cannot be met without special attention to these most vulnerable countries. In the same way, South-South cooperation would not be credible and meaningful if it's focus is not on these countries. As the United Nations High Level Committee on South-South Cooperation noted in its report of last year, the South-South agenda should be aligned with the MDGs with a special emphasis on the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States and Africa in general. It is encouraging that the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation has taken up this challenge by recommending that this fostering partnerships for the achievement

of MDGs should be one of the primary aims of the Global South Development Forum.

The information age that we are living in today provides new opportunities for broadening and deepening South-South cooperation. The growing availability and use of information and communication technologies in the South removes the physical barriers that were for a long time a major hindrance to South-South cooperation. It provides greater opportunities for sharing experiences, especially development solutions across the South. But more importantly, it enables different parts of the South to share in and contribute to the global body of knowledge for the benefit of humanity as a whole.

For developing countries, especially the most vulnerable ones, South-South cooperation is not just an option, but a must for their development. It is therefore important that appropriate structures are put in place to transform the vision of a prosperous global South into reality. I am convinced that the realization of the proposed Global South Development Forum and the Southern Leaders' Round Table would be a major milestone in this process. I therefore look forward to our full engagement in bringing these proposals to fruition.
