Ministerial Breakfast Meeting


Friday, 27 September 2013, 8.15 – 9.45

Turkish Center, 8th floor, New York

SUMMARY

The Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs, held in Istanbul in May 2011, agreed on the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA), which has set the ambitious goal of bringing half of the LDCs close to the point of graduation by 2020.

The adoption of this graduation goal is a watershed event in the history of the UN in the field of development. This is the first time that an entire group has resolved to exit from a category defined by poverty and vulnerability. Reaching this ambitious goal will entail structural socio-economic transformations in countries that have been largely left behind in the implementation of the MDGs. Graduation represents the achievement of a major milestone for LDCs’ development, including significant progress towards the fulfilment of development goals in respect of per capita income, human assets and economic vulnerability. Each instance of successful graduation will constitute an extraordinary success for the international community. How effective the LDCs’ efforts and the support by the international community will be in the coming years to accomplish this important aspiration is a litmus test for all.

In order to realize the overarching goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) to ensure that at least half of the countries in the category meet the criteria for graduation by 2020, the Governments of Turkey and Belgium, in collaboration with OHRLLS, organized a ministerial breakfast meeting to showcase countries who have set for themselves such ambitious goal and provide an opportunity for the Ministers from development partners and the Ministers from LDCs to engage in an interactive discussion highlighting the LDCs’ graduating strategies. The meeting aimed at garnering wide ranging support from the development partners with a view to sustain the LDCs’ efforts towards the full and timely implementation of the IPoA by 2020.

Opening remarks

His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey opened the meeting reconfirming Turkey’s strong commitment to LDCs’ development and graduation. He stressed that it was critical for the international community to give due attention to the challenges of these vulnerable countries. He reaffirmed that Turkey would stand ready to host a Science, Technology and Innovation Center/Technology Bank
dedicated to the LDCs and that the International Agricultural Center in İzmir was already working with the LDCs, mainly through training programmes. He further informed the meeting that his government intended to host the G20 Summit in 2015 as well as the mid-term review of the IPoA of the LDCs. The World Humanitarian Summit would be held for the first time in 2016 and take place in Istanbul.

His Excellency Mr. Jean-Pascal Labille, Minister for Development Cooperation of Belgium, underscored the importance of the efforts towards reducing inequality, which had become a priority for Belgium in the context of its development cooperation programmes. In this regard, he noted that more than half of Belgium’s development assistance was channelled to LDCs. He stressed the importance of eliminating corruption and improving governance. Moreover, social protection and health care would be critical to ensure a successful path towards graduation. In concluding, he recognized the need for the international community to work together to ensure a smooth transition from the LDC category for graduating countries.

Ms. Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, stated that MDG acceleration efforts were strongly linked to LDCs’ performance. However, she noted that despite many successes, these countries remained highly vulnerable to external shocks. She emphasized the need to address the concerns of graduating countries, particularly with regard to the loss of support measures inherent to the LDC category. Thus, she deemed it necessary to provide an adequate period of continued, additional international support to a smooth transition out of the LDC category. She added that the UNDP new strategic plan had prioritized LDCs and was strongly committed to the implementation of the IPoA. She confirmed that half of UNDP resources went to LDCs.

Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, stressed that important questions remained on how best the international community could support graduating LDCs. He noted that only three LDCs had graduated in the history of the category until 2013, which clearly signalled the need to put in place adequate measures to ensure that the IPoA goal of graduation could be achieved. He underscored the ambitious character of the IPoA priority actions, which required strong support of the international community to the LDCs in a more coherent, systemic manner, including through a critical areas of trade, investments and domestic resource mobilization.

Interactive discussions

Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, stressed the commitment of his country to graduate. This will require a process of transformation of the economy. He emphasized the need to pay attention to the human dimension in discussions on development. Bangladesh is seeking to become a middle income country when the country completes its Golden Jubilee as a sovereign state in
2021. He also noted that the international discussions around climate change are important, given that it can affect tremendously many developing countries, including Bangladesh.

H.E. Mr. Nassirou Bako Arifari, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Benin, as chair of the LDC group, stressed that his country, like many other LDCs, had been facing the consequences of climate change. He emphasized that there were few sustainable resources available and that many LDCs based their economic development on one single resource e.g. oil. He called on donor countries to have a holistic understanding of the situation of LDCs aspiring to graduate and provide maximum support in that complex transition period. He informed the meeting that Benin would be hosting a ministerial conference in the first quarter of 2014 to focus on the issue of productive capacity development in LDCs, looking in particular at fostering partnerships for LDCs.

H.E. Mr. Alounkeo Kittikhoun, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, expressed his country’s strong determination to graduate out of the LDC category in the near future. He noted, however, that the country could not do that alone. He stressed that Laos had been pursuing to transform itself from a landlocked to a ‘land linked’ country through the creation of an enhanced transport network, development of linkages through national roads, as well as through continued focus on agriculture development, food security, human and social development as key priorities. He referred to the considerable progress made by Lao PDR in some of the MDGs, particularly in the area of gender equality and child mortality. He added that his country had also been making progress towards building resilience to address its serious vulnerability to external shocks.

H.E. Mr. Lapo Pistelli, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy, underscored Italy’s strong committed to the LDCs and stressed that the financial and economic crisis had had a negative impact on LDCs, with many of them still highly dependent on global commodity prices. He added that in order to reverse this trend the international community had to use the whole menu of policies available. Other financial flows should be taken in consideration, not just ODA, targeting a holistic approach to the LDCs’ needs. He highlighted the role of private sector engagement as a decisive instrument in order to better support local development of human resources and capabilities. He noted that 45% of Italy’s ODA was devoted to LDCs, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

H.E. Maria Ângela Bragança, Secretary of State for Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Angola, expressed her country’s commitment towards graduation by 2020. She informed the meeting that the Angolan President had created an inter-ministerial commission to work on the elaboration of a graduation strategy. Visits to Cape Verde and Botswana had been made to learn from the experience of those countries during their graduation processes. Workshops with UNDP, OHRLLS and UNCTAD had been organized involving government, business organizations and academic institutions to raise national awareness and help formulating a national strategy towards graduation. She invited LDCs
to take leadership in their own graduation process and called the international community
to strengthen their engagement towards graduation and smooth transition.

The representative of Cambodia stated that his country still faced many development
challenges but it was strongly committed to graduate before the end of the decade. While
several MDGs, including goals 1, 4, 5 and 6 had been achieved, he underscored
Cambodia’s continued need for international support, especially in terms of technical
assistance. He stressed that inclusive partnerships, including with OHRLLS, were
fundamental to that achievement.

The representative of Nepal emphasized that the goal of graduation from LDC status
called for addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated
and holistic manner. He stressed that LDCs should receive enhanced special attention in
the formulation of a Post-2015 Development Agenda. He added that continued support by
the international community was crucial, especially from development partners, and
mentioned the importance of aligning international support with the national
development priorities of LDCs. Lastly, he mentioned that Nepal’s graduation plans
included a resource mobilization strategy.

The representative of France noted that strong attention towards LDC graduation was
vital. He mentioned that among many development challenges faced by LDCs, climate
change demonstrated the need for a universal approach in relation to the graduation
agenda. He added the importance of innovative financing instruments and an adequate
evaluation of financial aid.

The representative of Finland highlighted that investment towards LDCs graduation was
key. He added that climate funding would be critical. In that connection he called for an
agreement regarding financing for development. He also noted that LDCs would graduate
into a world with strong market competition. Therefore a smooth transition strategy was
essential.

The representative of Brazil confirmed his country’s commitment to LDC graduation as a
first step in a long-term process of development. He noted that Brazil also faced poverty
issues and had development needs. He expressed the commitment of Brazil to provide
expertise on public policies, noting for instance that the experience of Brazil in recent
years in reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion could be very fruitful for LDCs.

The representative of the European Union Commission reiterated its support to the
graduation of LDCs. She noted that the E.U. had adopted a strong focus on LDCs and
remained the most important trading partner and donor to the LDCs. She stressed the
importance of a smooth transition process that ensured national ownership and added
that the support of the international community would be essential.

The representative of Rwanda noted that her country was also aspiring to graduate. She
mentioned that Rwanda would be achieving many of the MDGs and its GDP had been
increasing, making it possible for Rwanda to become a middle income country by 2020. She stressed that in order to address their challenges as a landlocked LDC, focus would be put on enhancing the transport network. Moreover, she noted that the agriculture sector had been stimulated, along with the adoption of regional measures for better market integration. Another key dimension would be to ensure political stability in a vulnerable region.

The representative of Hungary stated that his country was an active member of the international community and willing to share experiences with LDCs, particularly in sustainable exploration and sanitation infrastructure. He emphasized the importance of clean water being available for all, and stressed the effect of climate change on LDCs, especially SIDS. He added that Hungary was engaged in building mechanisms to mitigate the effects of climate change in those countries.

The representative of China highlighted that the IPoA had a very ambitious goal and reiterated China’s commitment to its full implementation. In this regard, she cited China’s bilateral development assistance programmes in favor of LDCs, and the partnerships with some international organisations such as OHRLLS, UNPD, UNICEF and OCHA. She also referred to China’s poverty alleviation program. Poverty was still a serious issue for China since it accounted for the largest population below the poverty line. She expressed the commitment of China towards the development of the LDCs.

The representative of Norway stated that his country would continue to be a friend and partner of the LDCs. He mentioned that ODA would remain important in the future, but investment complemented by concrete commitments from all LDCs would play an increasingly critical role. He added that commitments should be based on four main pillars: provide basic services, such as health care, education, food and energy to the most vulnerable; promote gender equality; grow economic potential and rely on a sustainable development framework.

Closing remarks

Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya congratulated the participants for a rich discussion and stressed that graduation meant progress in human rights, inclusive economic growth and resilience based on sustainability and adaptation to climate change. He underscored the need for a smooth transition strategy after graduation and emphasized that this process required investments in infrastructure and capacity building, as well as efforts on energy and climate change. Therefore, the engagement of development partners would remain critical. Lastly, he noted that OHRLLS would further extend its support for graduating LDCs. This would be done by analyzing graduation drivers that identified successful practices as well as challenges ahead and would continue working towards bringing together development partners and LDCs.
H.E. Mr. Jean-Pascal Labille noted that particular attention should be placed on the LDCs throughout the elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A new framework would have to recognize that poverty eradication and sustainable development were mutually reinforcing and interlinked. Referring to the Outcome Document of the Special Event on the MDGs, he underscored the relevant paragraph on LDCs, which encouraged all actors to work together to overcome LDC challenges and ensure their development.

H.E. Mr. Cevdet Yılmaz, Minister of Development of Turkey appreciated the insightful discussions during the event. He stressed that development partners should continue to encourage LDCs to graduate, and added that a smooth transition was fundamental. He concluded by reiterating Turkey’s commitment to further enhance its support to the LDCs.