



**Remarks**

**by**

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**High Representative**

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

**and Small Island Developing States**

at

Partnership Dialogue

Increasing economic benefits to small island developing States and the least developing countries and providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

7 June 2017, New York

03:00-06:00 pm

Conference Room 4

Your Excellency, Mr. Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Marko Pomerants, Minister of Environment of Estonia,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Mohammed Shainee, Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture of the Maldives,  
Your Excellency Dame Meg Taylor, Pacific Ocean Commissioner,  
Ms. Laura Tuck, Vice President for Sustainable Development, World Bank Group  
Ms. Editrudith Lukanga, Co-President, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers,

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address today's Partnership Dialogue.

This historic Conference has been several years in the making and comes at a critical moment as nations of the world move into high gear on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But before I begin, allow me to congratulate Equatorial Guinea on graduating last Sunday from the category of LDCs. The goal articulated in the Istanbul Programme of Action is an ambitious one – for half the LDCs to meet the graduation criteria by 2020. I am happy to report that 9 other LDCs met the graduation criteria and would like to encourage LDCs and development partners to continue their efforts towards meeting this goal.

The Sustainable Development Goal 14 to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” is of particular importance to the countries in special situations - the least developed countries, the land-locked developing countries and the small islands developing states - where millions of people depend on marine resources for their

nutrition and their livelihoods. Harnessing ocean resources in a sustainable manner can lift communities out of poverty by increasing the economic benefits that flow to them, especially from the fisheries and tourism sectors. New and emerging sectors such as aquaculture and off-shore mineral exploration also hold great potential for these countries to derive further economic benefits from the ocean.

While in other parts of the world, there is concern regarding fishing capacities and the need to reduce them, SIDS' own national fishery capacities remain limited. In this regard, UN General Assembly resolutions have been adopted inviting the international community to assist SIDS, including through the transfer of marine technology, to develop their national capacities to exploit fishery resources. The continued cooperation of the distant-waters fishing nations and the assistance of the international community at large continues to be an important component for SIDS in their utilization of their EEZ's living resources.

Non-living resources and other sea-bed resources hold untapped economic potential that could be accessed by many SIDS and coastal LDCs. This potential has been under-utilized due, inter alia, to the potential damage to the marine environment, lack in capacity and technical know-how, and high costs. However, several recent developments should encourage these countries to benefit from these resources. These include the adoption of the Mining Code under the International Seabed Authority, technological developments allowing for more environment-friendly marine exploration, and cost-effective advances on operations.

SIDS and LDCs have a high level of intrinsic vulnerability related to external factors as they tend to be small, remote, exposed to trade related shocks and environmental shocks and have a narrow resource base. Furthermore, for both groups of countries, rapid population growth leading to urban congestion, scarcity of water resources, increased dependency on food imports and fossil fuel consumption are some of the growing and emerging challenges to sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs.

An over-riding factor to consider is the particular vulnerability of these countries to the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather events have a disproportionate and devastating effect on

SIDS and LDCs. Cyclone Enawo, which hit Madagascar in March 2017, affected almost half a million people and destroyed more than 40,000 houses. In the most affected areas, up to 85 per cent of planted subsistence crops were lost. Indeed, sea-level rise threatens the very existence of many SIDS. Arresting further climate change and scaling up adaptation projects are a precondition for these countries, including for tourism and other infrastructure. If we do not, long-term efforts can be undone in a matter of hours.

In the remainder of my intervention, I would like to focus on the tourism sector - the potential it holds and the associated challenges and possible solutions.

The tourism and travel sector is critical to SIDS and LDCs. It typically accounts for 25 per cent of GDP in SIDS, and can reach up to 79 per cent in some countries, and is a main source of foreign exchange. Of the fifteen top tourism contributors to GDP, thirteen are from the SIDS and LDCs group. Tourism has played a key role in the recent graduation from the LDCs category of Samoa, Cabo Verde and the Maldives.

Tourism can contribute to achieving not only SDG14, but many others SDGs as well, especially SDG1 on poverty, SDG 8 on sustainable economic growth and full and productive employment, and SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production.

The distinctiveness of cultures and the uniqueness of natural ecosystems are often the attraction for tourists. However, if not properly planned and managed, tourism could significantly degrade the environment on which it relies. The development of tourism needs to take into account cultural considerations, land use, water management, coastal zone management and the development of protected areas. The tourism sector can be used as a driver to improve the economic development of SIDS and LDCs and to protect the fragile environments of these countries. Tourism development and environmental management can be made to be mutually supportive, by identifying niche markets in eco-tourism, nature and cultural tourism, and involving local populations in the identification and management of natural protected areas set aside for eco-tourism.

The tourism industry is diverse and segmented, ranging for example from small scale diving or safari operations to large resort properties and cruise tourism. In the Pacific region, 90 per cent of the tourism industry is comprised of small and medium enterprises, whilst in others, the industry is dominated by firms which are not based in the country, being part of large international hotel chains, transportation firms, and cruise lines. The extent to which economic benefits flow to local businesses varies accordingly. This diversity in the tourism industry also adds complexity to ensuring that environmental best practices are adopted.

Water scarcity is a major environmental issue for most SIDS and many LDCS. Tourism's demand for water is high and growing, and the impact is compounded by the fact that the dry season is often peak tourist season in both groups of countries. Small freshwater aquifers can be easily depleted or salt-water intrusion can occur. Higher water consumption often implies large volumes of effluent, which can further contaminate freshwater resources. To properly manage water resources, a package of measures is needed, from improved treatment and reuse of grey water, to raising awareness among tourists on efficiency. With the right set of incentives and regulation, tourism can act as a catalyst for improved water management overall.

LDCs and SIDS often do not have advanced systems for solid\_waste management. High volumes of waste generation from tourism activity can compound the common problem. Limited land area in SIDS makes the option of landfill disposal unsustainable in the long term. Fragile ecosystems are also highly vulnerable to contamination by toxic and hazardous wastes and chemicals, and radioactive materials due to their isolated oceanic location. It is therefore imperative to develop environmentally sound solutions to waste management, as well as minimizing the environmental impact of tourism activity. Waste can be converting into a resource, while non-biodegradable and hazardous substances could be limited or banned altogether.

SIDS and many LDCs are heavily dependent on imported petroleum products and indigenous biomass fuels. Tourism is heavily energy dependent (mainly on fossil fuels), both in travel and in consumption at the destination.

Yet SIDS and LDCs often have sizeable untapped renewable energy endowments – solar, wind, wave and geothermal. However, their potential to exploit renewable energy resources is severely limited by the lack of capacity, both human and financial, as well as technological constraints. These include lack of scale, lack of substantial local investment, institutional capacity constraints, poor credit ratings, and low project preparation capacities. Future efforts must aim at increasing the viability of energy investments, lowering the associated risks and making the initiatives more “bankable and rapidly scalable”.

Development of the tourism sector faces intense competition for land use from urban settlements, agriculture, mining and commercial forestry, especially along coastal areas. These problems are more acute in SIDS owing to their small size. Competing claims need to be resolved in a fair and sustainable manner. Land-use plans should be prepared in conjunction with all key sectors and actors, to protect land resources, ensure sustainable and productive land-use and guard against land degradation, pollution and exceeding the carrying capacity.

Tourists are often drawn to the most pristine and environmentally sensitive sites, such as reefs and beaches. A strong role for environmental regulation may be required to minimize the footprint, as well as agreements with the industry and awareness-raising among the tourists themselves. The designation of protected areas, including marine protected areas, has an important role to play in preserving unique ecosystems. Local communities should be involved in and receive a fair share of the economic benefits from the tourism industry, which also creates a joint incentive for conservation.

In conclusion, the global trends and projections indicate that tourism will continue to grow. In 2016, tourist arrivals increased by 8 per cent in the Asia-Pacific region. Globally, total tourist arrivals are projected to increase from 1.2 billion in 2016 to 1.8 billion in 2030. It is therefore pertinent that SIDS and LDCs are well prepared for the expected increases. The economic proceeds from tourism already play an important role in the economies of SIDS and LDCs and can be further harnessed to help to combat poverty, strengthen resilience and achieve the SDGs.

However, measures need to be taken to ensure that mass unsustainable tourism is avoided, that tourism remains within the carrying capacity, and that large scale resort development does not negatively impact on the environment, while special care must be taken with fragile and pristine ecosystems.

Ways should be sought to ensure that economic benefits flow to local communities and enterprises, including tours, souvenirs and tourist services.

The SIDs and LDCs greatest assets are their people, environment and culture which are well suited to the increasing tourist markets. With the right funding support, mix of policies, awareness and incentives, tourism can be used as a driver and a tool to help LDCs and SIDS overcome some of the disadvantages they face, and deploy environmentally sound technologies that would not otherwise be accessible for local communities and visitors alike.

Thank you.

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