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UN-OHRLLS

**Keynote address
by**

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

**High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

High-level Meeting on ‘Achieving Sustainable Graduation for the LDCs’

Opening Session

Venue: Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel

**Dhaka, Bangladesh
29 November 2017
09:00 a.m. - 09:45 a.m.**

Your Excellency, Hon. Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh
Your Excellency, Mr Tofail, Ahmed, Hon Minister of Commerce of Bangladesh
Excellencies, My fellow UN Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both my great pleasure and honour to be with you. First, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh for the kind hospitality extended to us since our arrival, and for hosting this strategic High-level Meeting titled ‘Achieving Sustainable Graduation for least developed countries in this beautiful setting.

I also thank the Governments of Switzerland and Norway for their generous support for the organisation of this conference.

What brings us all together, I am sure, is our shared concern on how we can work toward SUSTAINABLE graduations.

It is thus with gratitude that I acknowledge the presence of so many senior officials from the least developed countries, the presence of development partners, UN system colleagues, representatives of the graduated countries, representatives of the private sector and civil society as well as representatives of international organisations and development banks.

It is good to see this broad range of stakeholders, partners coming together sharing a determination for action so that the words we signed off on from the Istanbul Programme of Action to the Agenda 2030 become reality for all.

You all show how it is by coming together that we can find ways forward to deliver on the promises we made to the hundreds of millions of peoples in the least developed countries to realise their aspirations.

Thank you !

It is my sincere hope that by bringing together all stakeholders, this meeting will identify concrete means and ways to accelerate the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

This programme , adopted in 2011, called for a strong emphasis on graduation and smooth transition to graduation of the LDCs.

We are a few weeks away from 2018 or in other words just a mere two years away from the 2020 mark signalling the conclusion of the 2011-2020 timeframe for the Istanbul Programme.

The good news is that more and more countries are reaching the thresholds for graduation. What is clear is that we will not fully meet the ambitious objective of enabling half of the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020. But the potential is there to come close, provided we rapidly and considerably step up our joint efforts to implement the IPoA and 2030 Agenda.

I look at this as an inspiring development. after all, let us take note of the fact that since the creation of the LDC category in 1971 until the adoption of the Istanbul Programme of Action, only 3 countries had graduated ! That means less than one per decade elapsed !

Following the adoption of the IPoA in 2011, Samoa and Equatorial Guinea have graduated and Vanuatu and Angola are scheduled to graduate in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Tuvalu and Kiribati have also met the graduation criteria twice already. In addition, Bhutan, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste all met the graduation thresholds for the first time in 2015.

The trend is positive and expected to last with an increasing number of countries likely to meet the graduation criteria.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

This begs the question - why do we meet then?

As I said a moment ago, the emphasis of our meeting is on the SUSTAINABLE of graduations.

The reason for our gathering, its focus is to discuss how we - as the global community - can ensure that the countries who are on their way out of the LDC category will continue to grow and prosper after their graduation - how to ensure the graduation is indeed SUSTAINABLE. How do we ensure resilience mechanisms are in a lasting way in place - resilience against conflicts, climate change, health crises, financial shocks?

It must be our shared interest to ensure that the countries that have worked so hard towards graduation will have access to support when they face the new post-graduation realities.

Hesitations and a sense of uneasiness remain linked to graduation. I even dare to say that some countries feel that they will graduate into the unknown and that the risks associated with the process are too big a challenge.

It is well recognised that there exists tension between putting aid to the most vulnerable and continuing to support developing countries after they have graduated from LDC status.

The key message I want to convey this morning is that graduation, which really is the result of sustained strong will and hard-earned progress made at country level, is neither a threat or a risk.

Graduation is definitely a great milestone in each country's development path and something to be very proud of and to build on.

On the other hand, we must not look at graduation as a cut-off point but as a determined move towards sustained and sustainable development as part of a virtuous and inclusive structural transformation path deserving to be accompanied throughout.

Adjusting to post graduation realities requires thorough planning.

The reality is that graduation from the LDC category results in varying levels of phasing-out of LDC-specific support measures. This means, countries need to be prepared, understand the emerging vulnerabilities and challenges to their economies and proactively negotiate with their development and trading partners.

Indeed, we must look at LDC graduation in its larger developmental context. A sustainable graduation is about more than reaching the cut-off points of the three graduation criteria currently in use.

Sustainability implies that we take a holistic approach towards equitable and sustainable development truly capable of leaving no one behind.

Successful graduations all have shown that it is nationally owned comprehensive smooth transition strategies playing a crucial role in adjusting to the phasing out of LDC benefits.

Successful graduations also have shown how graduations create new opportunities and potential. This includes shifting perceptions like increased trust in more conducive business environments and enhanced creditworthiness.

This meeting's key question is:

how can we direct the momentum that comes with LDC graduation toward a sustainable path allowing for achieving the 2030 Agenda goals and their ambition to leave no one behind?

We have two days of intensive exchanges and work ahead of us to focus on the potential impacts of graduation on the graduating countries, how to deal with these and come up with actionable recommendations on what has to be put in place to transition toward sustainable graduation.

During our first session today, we will discuss the role of smooth transition strategies in adjusting to the phasing out of LDC specific benefits.

In our second session, we will look how LDC graduation strategies can directly contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

After that we will explore how global partnerships can accelerate sustainable graduation.

Tomorrow morning we will discuss in detail some country case studies and share best practices from already graduated countries.

In our final session, we will deliberate on the tools needed for the sustainability of graduation.

The discussions and proposals presented during the two days will be summarized and presented in a Co-Chairs' summary at the end of our meeting.

And then what, you may wonder?

OHRLLS and our host country will bring back the key messages of this meeting to New York; especially to the Expert Group Meeting on UN support for graduation and smooth transition of LDCs, which will take place in just a couple weeks on 14 December.

The work of this meeting will also feed into the Secretary-General's report on Graduation and Smooth Transition that OHRLLS will prepare in 2018 in line with my office's mandate to lead and coordinate the work of the UN system in providing graduation support.

I pledge to all of you my own and my office's determination to intensify our work to help provide strengthened support to least developed countries aspiring to sustainable graduation paths.

I look forward to listening to you, learning from you, to our exchanges of experiences and fruitful action-driven work over the next two days.

Thank you.