



**Statement
by**

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

**Expert Group Meeting on United Nations support for Graduation and
Smooth Transition for the LDCs**

Opening Session

Conference Room 11

United Nations Headquarters, New York
14 December 2017
10 to 10:30 a.m.

Excellency, Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh & Chair of the LDC Group
Excellencies,
UN colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends

It is a special pleasure for myself and my office to be with you and to organize this meeting.

I first thank all of you for actively participating in our important meeting.

The meeting takes on special importance as we find ourselves at a critical juncture for the Least Developed Countries.

It is good to see the participation of representatives from the LDCs, from the countries that have already graduated from the category, from experts and from the Agencies, Funds and Programmes of the United Nations all sitting around this table.

Indeed, coming together as one is key to confronting the challenges ahead.

I am convinced that the deep level of experience and knowledge present in this room will lead to productive and action-focused discussions and deliberations.

It is indeed your experience, your knowledge that will help us in our endeavour to enhance our work as One United Nations system to support the LDCs during the important stages of achieving graduation and especially toward achieving sustainable graduations.

Our discussions today are crucial for you the LDCs and for us the United Nations.

The purpose of our meeting is straightforward:

How can we, the United Nations, provide the best possible support to you in your path toward a sustainable graduation?

I will come back to the importance I place on the sustainability dimension of graduation.

Just recently, we concluded a High-level event on graduation and transition with the Government of Bangladesh.

The key message from the meeting is clear:

graduation from the category of LDCs is a milestone but not an end in itself or an end point.

The job, if I may use the expression, is definitely not done once the “label “ has been given. The challenge remains for a graduation to be sustainable.

This, in turn, requires strong and dedicated support that facilitates a smooth transition and sustainability thereafter.

Already in 2011, the Istanbul Programme of Action adopted at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the LDCs placed graduation and smooth transition of the LDCs as an overarching objective.

We are just three years away from the conclusion of the timeframe established in the Istanbul Programme of Action.

Some signs are encouraging as an increasing number of countries reaches the thresholds for graduation.

This certainly is a remarkable result given the complex global economic circumstances experienced since 2008.

Just for comparison's sake, since the creation of the category of Least Developed Countries in 1971, only 3 countries had graduated by 2011 or less than one per decade!

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. In addition, other LDCs met the graduation thresholds for the first time in 2015.

This indeed is a positive trend and one we hope to be a lasting trend.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

Graduating from the category of Least Developed Countries is a key milestone.

But how do we turn such milestone into sustainable and extraordinary opportunity for the more than 900 million people living in LDCs? How do we turn this into what Agenda 2030 strives for - leave no one behind?

Indeed, sustainability and leaving no one behind are core to what we together, all of the stakeholders, ought to strive for.

Just a couple days ago I returned from the WTO 11th Ministerial Meeting in Buenos Aires where trade and the importance of enhancing LDC trade opportunities for sustainable development were discussed.

I brought forward the concern that we cannot treat graduation as a one shot moment- we need to be equally concerned about how sustainable the graduations are given the rapidly evolving and ever more complex global financial, economic, technological settings within which countries need to position themselves. And I add, need to do so rather rapidly.

While graduation is defined by globally agreed-on criteria, we need to better understand what it takes for graduation to be sustainable. This involves a better understanding of what we need to do to cement hard-won gains, ensure their inclusive sharing in societies and what next steps are necessary to build on the gains.

Graduation should not be a cut-off point. To harness its full potential we need to explore what support countries should continue to receive in terms of development finance or technical assistance, what access to trade preferences is needed.

In various fora now, I have cautioned against sudden disruptions that bear the high risk to cause serious and lasting harm to the economy, key sectors like health and education, productive sectors or access to technology.

Indeed, many graduating countries remain vulnerable to internal inequalities, external shocks and climate change induced vulnerabilities and we need to focus much more on what has to be done, as I said before, to help consolidate hard won gains.

Today provides us with the opportunity to discuss how the United Nations and other international organizations can best support countries that are on their way out of the LDC category so they can continue to grow and prosper after their graduation.

Many have expressed a sense of uneasiness linked to graduation. Uncertainty and risks associated with the process are seen by many countries as a formidable challenge.

Of course, the great volatility of the global financial, trade and economic system and the lingering questions of the way forward in multi-lateral cooperation add to the real and perceived challenges.

But let us not forget, graduation really is the result of a sustained strong will, represents hard-earned progress and it is neither a threat or a risk. Let us focus on the opportunity it represents.

Graduation is a key chapter in the path toward realizing a national vision for sustainable development.

It is an outstanding achievement that should serve as a strong foundation for further inclusive and sustainable development as expressed in Agenda 2030.

Graduation is not an end - it is a beginning of a new chapter.

It is the transition from one chapter you close to the opening of the new chapter you look forward to that is of concern to you and to us.

How do we best prepare this transition?

Part of the answer lies of course in thorough planning and preparation under the leadership of the country with the support and assistance from your development partners.

But how do we also address the fact that graduation from the LDC category results in varying levels of phasing-out of LDC-specific support measures?

Countries need to be prepared, understand emerging vulnerabilities and challenges to their economies and proactively negotiate with their development and trading partners.

Graduation is more than a numbers issue - it is about how key services function, how trade is affected, how internal social and economic imbalances can be addressed, how to notch up comparative advantage in the ever more complex and more and more technology and innovation driven world economy.

Indeed, we must look at LDC graduation in its larger developmental context.

Time has come to take a comprehensive and holistic approach on how to facilitate the path towards equitable and sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

The design and implementation of smooth transition strategies that are nationally owned is key and must address the phasing out of international support measures.

This is an action path where we, entities of the One United Nations, can support you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

So, my key question to you all is:

How can we, as the United Nations, enhance our support to the LDCs in their way to sustainable graduation and during the transition phase?

How can we assist in harnessing the momentum created by graduation as foundation in your path towards achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Our day is structured around three substantive sessions and a final session in which we will summarize the result of our deliberations prior to the closing of the meeting.

I very much hope for deliberations paying attention to practical and action-oriented proposals.

In the first session, we will learn about the technical aspects related to the graduation process.

The second session will provide us with an opportunity to hear from our colleagues from the UN system about their work in supporting LDCs for graduation and during the transition phase.

In the third session, we have the privilege to benefit from the experience, knowledge and also expectations of representatives from LDCs that are at one of the stages toward graduation as well as from countries that have graduated.

It is a rich programme, it is an intense meeting ahead of us.

Your work will be critical work -

and I can only repeat myself: the more than 900 million people - and especially the youth - in LDCs expect action from us - patience for words may already have run out.

So, let us all be mindful of our respective responsibilities and to all of you , I assure you of my personal and my office's determination to intensify our work to provide you with the value-adding support needed to achieve sustainable graduation paths.

I look forward to listening to your experiences, ideas and suggestions

Thank you.