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Statement

by

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High Representative

and

Under-Secretary-General

**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

at

Meeting of National Focal Points of Least Developed Countries

**Thursday, 12 July 2018, 9:30 a.m.
Conference Room 11**

Excellency, Ambassador Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN and Chair of the LDC Global Coordination Bureau,

ASG Harris

Excellency, Ambassador Stener, Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN,

Distinguished National Focal Points of LDCs,

Colleagues ,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What a pleasure to open the annual meeting of National Focal Points of LDCs !

Welcome to ALL of you.

First, I must thank the Governments of Norway and Denmark for your strong and continued support to the least developed countries and for funding this year's meeting.

I also want to thank colleagues from the UN for your active participation and your spirit of partnership and contributions.

The annual meeting of National Focal Points of LDCs is special.

Once a year, we have this unique and very value-adding opportunity to hold our face-to-face substantive and candid discussions on priority issues surrounding the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

It is all about reviewing progress, sharing best practices, addressing challenges and identifying ways forward.

As they say - think globally, act locally. You, the national focal points are key in this.

Your updates on the implementation of the IPoA in your respective countries, in particular in regard to obstacles and shortfalls, you are our reality check.

You are the ones who can speak to the local effectiveness of the support provided by development partners and that does include us here in the UN system.

Your views, your recommendations should greatly contribute to steering our focus and especially our efforts to deliver targeted and value-adding support and policy advice.

The relevance of what we do ultimately is what counts if we are to effectively support countries in their implementation of the IPoA.

Since our meeting last year, OHRLLS has endeavored to increase communication with you. I look forward to your feedback on this. This year a key topic is to enhance the capacity of the National Focal Points in monitoring the implementation of the IPoA.

This is why we devote one session to address the critical capacity constraints in data collection and utilization for evidence-based policy making of LDCs.

Advocacy is also critical. OHRLLS has increased our advocacy efforts to build effective partnerships across the UN-system and with all stakeholders. This has included and will continue to include close engagement with high-level policymakers to promote implementation of the IPoA. This, I hope, should facilitate your efforts in domestic coordination and again, I look forward to your feedback and suggestions on this.

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues

We are at a critical juncture. People will not measure us by outwards but by tangible action.

Two and a half years separate us from the target date to achieve the IPoA goals. Not much time!

LDCs as a group are lagging behind for several targets.

We have very uneven results in the implementation of the IPoA as outlined in the Secretary-General's report on the IPoA, which was presented to ECOSOC on 2 July.

In 2017, just 9 LDCs achieved growth of almost 7 per cent or more – which is the IPoA target.

The share of LDC exports of goods and services continued to decline, moving further away from the IPoA target of 2 per cent of global exports.

Amid encouraging progress in graduation from the LDC status, poverty remains a major concern. At the current pace, we can not achieve poverty eradication by 2020 as stipulated by the IPoA nor as envisaged by the Agenda 2030.

Building productive capacity and achieving structural transformation are critical for sustainable development of LDCs. At present, progress towards shifting production to high productivity activities in the manufacturing and specialized services sectors is limited.

To measure progress in the implementation of the IPoA and SDGs, national statistical systems in LDCs need to produce accurate, reliable, easy-to-use, timely and disaggregated data and statistics. However, they still face significant capacity constraints.

This just for some challenges!

But we also see encouraging signs and hopefully we can build on these. Allow me to spend a brief moment on work OHRLLS has pushed to support countries' efforts in key areas.

Science, technology and innovation increasingly are the key drivers for sustainable, resilient and inclusive development.

This is an area where a high risk of being left behind exists for the LLDCs and LDCs.

In June this year, we inaugurated - well some would say finally - the premises of the Technology Bank for LDCs in Gebze, Turkey.

Incidentally, this marked the achievement of the first target of the 2030 Agenda, SDG target 17.8.

Harnessing science, technology and innovation capacity in and for LDCs will be a key determinant in overcoming structural challenges and promote economic growth, social progress and resilience building.

I am pleased to inform you that work is underway on preparing science, technology and innovation reviews, technology needs assessments and on promoting digital access to research and technical knowledge.

On a related subject, and that is the subject of connectivity- very important for the LDCs, we will also launch during this meeting a report on broadband development in four LDCs to highlight the transformational role of broadband internet in helping LDCs overcome their vulnerability, promote economic growth and enhance people's livelihoods.

Attracting investment is another key concern. OHRLLS undertakes a set of initiatives to boost investment promotion regimes for LDCs which were discussed at this year's Financing for Development Forum. They include providing legal and technical support to LDCs in investment-related negotiations and dispute settlement through the International Development Law Organization and improving the capacity of investment promotion agencies of LDCs.

Graduation is the key goal and typically marks the long-term social and economic achievements of LDCs.

In the triennial review of the least developed country category by the Committee for Development held in March 2018, four countries - Bhutan, Kiribati, São Tomé and Príncipe and Solomon Islands - were recommended for graduation.

In addition, Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Myanmar met the graduation criteria for the first time. To date, five LDCs have graduated, and 12 LDCs are at different stages of graduation.

So, this is overall encouraging.

With this growing number of LDCs meeting the criteria for graduation, we though must not loose sight of making these graduations sustainable.

This concerns me greatly and I have over and over called for looking at smooth transitions.

Currently, OHRLLS is finalizing a report on "Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support", which will make suggestions for enhanced support for smooth transition and incentivizing graduation.

OHRLLS has also been asked by member states to bridge UN processes with other global processes. Briefing sessions have been organized to bring together the combined UN-system capacities and international system to interact with permanent representatives of LDCs and other vulnerable countries.

The glass is half-full. Many challenges are ahead and we are having discussions about holding a Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries for a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of the IPoA and reinvigorate global actions towards LDCs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overarching goal of the IPoA is to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries.

But that is not an end in and of itself- the purpose is straightforward:

this is what it will take to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from the least developed country category.

Our meeting has a tall agenda.

1. we must look at how to tackle issues concerning transforming and diversifying economies of LDCs. There is not going to be a one size fits all solution but let us explore key focus areas shared by all countries
2. we must address statistical constraints of LDCs in monitoring the implementation of the IPoA

and

3. we must discuss tailored support for capacity building and

FINALLY

4. given how structural transformation and graduation are linked, we must take stock of progress concerning graduation from the LDC category.

I all this , I urge you to have open, frank and action-oriented discussions while I look forward to listening to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues

In Agenda 2030, the global community promised people to leave no one behind.

The people in the LDCs are now at risk of being left behind.

Countries have to be in the driver's seat but cannot achieve the ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda alone.

Partnerships and International support will continue to be of critical importance.

Both, increased access to development finance, including the critical climate finance, and streamlined, faster disbursement of available financing mechanisms without compromising on transparency and accountability are needed.

The international community and that does include the UN system must accelerate value-adding support to the most vulnerable countries. Time is of the essence and we must respond to needs, be concrete and focus on result. We must look more closely into how we can support countries in strengthening their human and institutional capacities for an inclusive and sustainable development path.

ACTION is the operative word!

We have a full agenda ahead of us.

I now close my remarks. I thank you for your work and I look forward to listening to you, engaging with you and wish you productive deliberations in the next two days.

Thank you.