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Statement
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Office of the
High Representative
and
Under-Secretary General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and
Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)

at the Friends of LDCs meeting

4 February 2019
from 1:00pm-2:45pm
885 Second Avenue, 45th
Thank you distinguished Co-Chair for giving me the floor again.

2018 was full of events in the UN. I guess 2019 also shapes already up as a very busy year!

My sincere thank you goes to both the former Chair Bangladesh and the current Chair Malawi as well as other members of the bureau. Without your excellent work in promoting the interest of LDCs in various forums, we could not have made the progress we made.

A very big thank you also must go to the Friends of LDCs for your unwavering support to the priorities of LDCs and their peoples.

Allow me to quickly brief you on some activities that OHRLLS has engaged in during 2018.

The Technology Bank for LDCs, as you know, is fully operational. On 4 December 2018, the new Managing Director Mr. Joshua Setipa took over.

With support from OHRLLS, the Technology Bank is carrying out capacity building in digital access to research in 12 LDCs and STI/Technology Needs Assessment in 5 LDCs.

This start up phase of the functioning of the Bank remains challenging. While OHRLLS will continue to support the Bank as far as we can, including with the preparation of the 2019 work programme, it is critical that the Technology Bank remains high on the agenda of the Member States. As I have said on previous occasions, a key concern remains the further mobilization of resources.

2018 witnessed, and we all were happy to celebrate this, considerable progress in the area of graduation. 12 of the current LDCs have fulfilled the criteria for graduation at least once. The General Assembly has taken decisions on the graduation of Bhutan, Solomon Islands and Sao Tome and Principe last December.

More must happen as we all agreed.

My office has set up an Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on graduation. What is its objective? It is to enhance support for graduation and look at incentives to ensure that graduation is sustainable. The IATF at this stage has agreed to send a joint mission to one of the graduating countries to provide coordinated support for the preparation of smooth, sustainable transition strategies.

We also convened a two-day meeting of LDC national focal points with a number of UN agencies on the sidelines of the HLPF 2018. focal points not only shared each other’s best practices but also identified a range of effective policy options to accelerate implementation of the IPoA.

Access to sustainable, clean energy is high on the LDCs agenda. The Office organized a side event at the Global SDG7 Conference on Energy Access for Structural Transformation and Sustainable Development in LDCs in Bangkok. We also organized a competition for journalists from least developed countries on sustainable energy.
We also convened the annual Ministerial Breakfast meeting of LDCs and friends in Washington D.C. on the margins of the World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings. The meeting focused on maximizing finance for development in LDCs on sustainable energy.

Our 2019 breakfast meeting will be held on 13 April. We will focus on how IDA 19 replenishment can contribute to strengthen resilience to shocks in LDCs.

OHRLLS furthermore supports two main initiatives on investment promotion and support for LDCs.

An Investment Support Programme was designed in close cooperation with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO). The programme objective is to provide investment-related negotiation and dispute-settlement advisory and representation services to LDC governments and LDC companies on a “pro-bono” or reduced-fee basis.

Together with UNCTAD, UNIDO, ILO, EIF and WAIPA, a Capacity Development Programme for LDC investment promotion agencies was formulated. I encourage the Friends of LDCs to consider contributing to this program.

Another key feature of sustainable graduations concerns connectivity. OHRLLS facilitated the preparation and the launch of the Broadband Commission report “Broadband for national development in four LDCs: Cambodia, Rwanda, Senegal and Vanuatu”. The report shows how broadband, or high-speed internet, helps LDCs overcome vulnerabilities, grow economies and enhance people’s livelihoods.

LDCs are also countries disproportionately impacted by climate change. I had the opportunity to attend COP 24 held in Poland in December last year. At the COP24, the Parties updated the LDCs work programme to reflect the needs of the LDCs, thereby continuing support provided on a range of issues LDCs face. We seek to arrange briefings on the LDC climate change agenda to the PRs of LDCs in New York.

Turning again to the busy 2019, OHRLLS and the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization (GEIDCO) of China will organize a Global Conference on “Scaling-up Energy Access and Finance in Least Developed Countries”. This takes place from 30-31 May 2019 in Beijing, China. Invitations will be shared with you shortly.

A high-level side event on the theme “Leveraging South-South and Triangular Cooperation to Advance Sustainable Development in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS” is scheduled tentatively on 21 March 2018 in Buenos Aires, Argentina on the margins of the BAPA+40.

Finally, I draw your attention to the global partnerships for LDCs.

It is nobody's secret that the LDCs are in need of scaled up resources for the implementation of the IPoA and the 2030 Agenda.

Access to the means of implementation continues to remain a major hurdle for many.

Throughout the year, I want to notch up OHRLLS advocacy work with and for LDCs. We must further dialogue with development partners, including countries of the emerging South to
The report highlights that poverty and malnutrition remain high. A third of the 1 billion people in LDCs continue to live in extreme poverty.

Just two years are left to achieve the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA)!

Growth in LDCs is estimated to have increased to 4.9 percent in 2017 but falls short of the 7 per cent target of the IPoA. How will we reconcile this with facts such as that the number of undernourished people has increased from 216 million in the period 2004–2007 to 237 million in 2015–2017?

As I said, the special focus of the report is on reducing vulnerabilities and increasing resilience in LDCs.

It will be no surprise to you that the report finds extreme vulnerability to shocks ranging from climate change, to disasters, economic and social disturbances. This severely affects the ability of LDCs to achieve inclusive, sustainable development.

The report underlines that global responses to some of these shocks, in particular to climate change, have not matched the magnitude of the challenges LDCs experience.

LDCs continue to have little or no access to risk transfer mechanisms due to their limited ability to pay insurance premiums and additional capacity constraints.

You may say, we have heard this before but now what do we do?

A key recommendation is that we must build resilience at ALL levels. This goes from the local, the individual, to the institutional, the private sector and of course national levels.

Incorporating all levels of action is essential for LDCs to progress on achieving sustainable development.

And, of course, the resource-constrained LDCs more than ever need the support by development partners, including International Financial Institutions, to develop and access insurance schemes to shield against new and emerging shocks.

A specific recommendation is that macroeconomic policies need to take external shocks much more into account through countercyclical fiscal policy with provisions on financial buffers for
“self-insurance” to build adequate resources during booms and to spend them during downturns.

It also is important for LDCs and their creditors to incorporate some of the contingencies directly into their sovereign debt contracts, so that when disasters and shocks occur, countries are able to postpone their payments or reduce them during recovery.

This to share few key points - I guess if we hoped for a calmer 2019, we already know that this will be as busy if not busier a year than 2018!

I thank you all for your kind attention.