Statement

by

H.E. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu
High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States
at
Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries

28th May 2019

at

United Nations Conference Centre Bangkok, Thailand
28 May 2019
Executive Secretary of ESCAP
Hon Ministers
Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives
Excellencies,
colleagues and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I thank ESCAP for your partnership with OHRLLS!

Today is an important meeting for us to have substantive discussions on the development challenges of the Asia Pacific LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. From there, it is about recommendations for action.

As I say over and over, time for action is now!

Before us, we have ESCAP's comprehensive report on the Asia Pacific Countries with Special Needs.

The report is clear that despite some progress in these countries, they are yet to overcome deep-rooted and multifaceted structural challenges.

The glass is half full!

Yes, progress in structural transformation can be noted but countries still predominantly rely on their agricultural sector for employment.

High value-added productive activities are not taking hold. Hence, countries remain highly vulnerable to commodity price shocks and endogenous as well as exogenous macroeconomic shocks.

The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are also among the countries hardest hit by new and emerging challenges.

We all know how they are highly vulnerable to climate change and are disproportionately affected by its devastating impacts.

A top priority we must act on is that of building preparedness and resilience against shocks and crises.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

OHRLLS does its work in response to inter-governmental mandates.
In a snapshot, it all is about support to accelerating the development of the 91 most vulnerable countries of the UN membership, which are grouped into LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

As a voice for countries and their over one billion people, it is OHRLLS' duty to facilitate coordination and the mobilizing of the international community in support of development agendas of countries we serve.

In this day and age of communication, we must amplify the voices of those most in need and bring their perspectives to global debates and decision-making processes.

The 2030 Agenda the international community signed off on promises to leave no one behind. This is a promise we MUST keep and Agenda 2030 has and must continue to place priority on these three groups of countries.

From the perspective of OHRLLS work, we underpin our advocacy, our voice role through knowledge products and analytical reports.

These factual documents inform advocacy, follow-up activities and provide backstopping support to the most vulnerable countries in their inter-governmental negotiations.

We facilitate the Secretary-General’s annual report on the three groups of countries and publish annually a flagship report entitled “state of the least developed countries”. Each year is dedicated to a specific thematic focus.

You may argue there are many reports from many sources!

Yet, this improved analytical support is critical because we table evidence-based backstopping material to the three constituencies. We also produce thematic studies and analytical reports on the priority issues the three groups of countries face.

OHRLLS shaped three key initiatives for LDCs. The Technology Bank, the Investment Promotion Regime and the Crises Mitigation and Resilience Building for LDCs.

The Technology Bank for LDCs is established and operates. This marked the achievement of SDG target 17.8.

The Office designed an Investment Support Programme in cooperation with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO).

This instrument delivers on investment-related negotiation and dispute-settlement advice and support to LDC governments and LDC companies on a “pro-bono” or reduced-fee basis.

Another key aspect of our work pertains to the so-called graduation issue. The issue has gained momentum in the global development discourse.
Only five countries had graduated since the establishment of the category of LDCs in 1971, 12 additional countries have reached the graduation thresholds as of March 2018.

As I said earlier, we are working with a glass half full.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, OHRLLS, in late 2017, established an interagency task force on the graduation of LDCs.

Why? This is about providing strengthened and coordinated United Nations system-wide support to the graduating countries. The Task Force will soon be sending a joint mission to one of the graduating countries.

We all are aware of the saying "help people to help themselves" - in other words: capacity building is key!

In line with this, OHRLLS supported the establishment of the International Think Tank for LLDCs. This is the first-ever intergovernmental body of the LLDCs to produce top-quality research and advocacy to improve the ability of LLDCs to address their special needs.

Trade is at the core of structural transformation and OHRLLS played its share in a growing number of landlocked developing countries ratifying the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Now, to trade means being equipped with the basic infrastructure including energy and ICT and so the Office plans to help strengthen the capacity of the landlocked developing countries to develop bankable infrastructure projects and to promote trade facilitation.

Let me now turn to a very special group, the SIDS.

We all know how SIDS are as much land as ocean nations. We all know of the very challenging remoteness, size and vulnerability factors SIDS have to manage. SIDS literally need all the partners possible and the private sector has a key role to play.

In response, OHRLLS convened the SIDS Global Business Network Forum, a third in a series of SIDS Private Sector Partnership Forums, which was launched by UN-OHRLLS and its partners at the Samoa Conference.

The focus of the forthcoming fourth Forum will be on Oceans, and it will be held in the Pacific Region in 2020.

OHRLLS furthermore established platforms for promoting exchange of best practices and peer-learning among SIDS and between SIDS and the global community on the key themes of sustainable energy, broadband connectivity and resilient transport infrastructure.

These are basics if we are to achieve the SDGs. As a component part of this effort, we organize a Global Conference on “Scaling-up Energy Access and Finance in Least Developed Countries”, which will be held from 30-31 May 2019 in Beijing, China.
Needless to say, we extend support to the delegations of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, whenever requested, in their articulation in major international policies and measures including in the GA, ECOSOC, Funds and Programmes and other forums.

My office has forged strong UN system-wide collaboration through the inter-agency consultative group (IACG) mechanisms for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, which have been meeting regularly. ESCAP is an active member in all the IACGs.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Well, after I now shared quite the list of let me say the menu of our work, allow me to turn to some critical events for all of us concerned to ensure we do not leave the over one billion people of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS behind!

The Mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway takes place on 27 September 2019.

ESCAP has played a key role in the preparatory process of this review.

The review is our invaluable opportunity to direct the international community’s attention to the special case of SIDS.

The draft outcome has already been issued. Negotiations have started.

The draft outcome document squarely states the key issues for SIDS and sets priorities for the next phase of the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. We hope that the MTR can agree on a solid, action-oriented, and concise declaration, that will raise the profile of SIDS on the global agenda and lead to action. The urgency of action was once more driven home in strong terms during our Secretary- General A. Guterres recent visit to the Pacific.

Similarly, the comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the VPoA will be convened in December 2019 in New York.

This will take place at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly as mandated by the General Assembly. It will assess progress made, identify obstacles and constraints encountered. Key is to find ways to accelerate implementation in the remaining 5 years.

I must thank ESCAP for organizing a highly effective regional review of the VPoA for the region.

The Africa Regional review meeting was held in March this year. The Latin America regional review meeting will be held in Santiago, Chile on 11 and 12 June 2019.

The intergovernmental consultations on the outcome of the Midterm Review will begin soon after the Latin America regional meeting.
Again, we hope that the outcome document of the Midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action is ambitious, comprehensive, and action-oriented. We must achieve the desired socioeconomic transformation of LLDCs in the remaining five years.

The General Assembly has decided to convene the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-V) in 2021 at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government.

The Conference will be preceded by two Preparatory Committee Meetings in 2020 and 2021.

OHRLLS has been designated by the General Assembly as the focal point for the preparations of the Conference.

We are now looking for the host country of the Conference. At present several countries expressed interest in hosting the Conference. The ECOSOC resolution on LDCs is expected to finalize the host country for the Conference.

The year 2019 sure is a busy year and one of critical importance!

The Secretary-General convenes the Climate Change Summit, SDG Summit, High-level dialogue of Financing for Development, and the High-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage.

Indeed, 2019 is the year where we must act - time is not on our side even if the glass is half-full!

All three groups of countries OHRLLS is a voice for, are actively participating in the ongoing preparatory works related to these critical meetings.

We all need to work together. It is only as partners, as a team that we can keep the promise of leaving no one behind and the over one billion people of the 91 most vulnerable countries of our planet deserve nothing less!

So, let us rally to keep our promise to them!

Thank you.