Opening Remarks

by

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“COP 25 SIDE EVENT: From Andes to Alps and other mountains: Elevating regional cooperation on monitoring and climate change adaptation”

18:30-20:00, 11 December 2019

Hall 4 Room 2
Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to deliver the opening remarks at this important event.
I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Austria, the UN Environment Programme, the Alpine Convention and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) for the kind invitation – and for their vital work in fostering cooperation between mountainous countries and regions on adaptation to climate change.

My office is responsible for advocacy in favour of the 91 vulnerable countries, comprising Small Island Developing States, the Least Developed Countries and the Land-locked Developing Countries.

The 32 landlocked developing countries with a total population of 508 million, 7% of the world’s population, and 22% of the global land area, all share geographical settings deeply impacting on their potential to engage with the rest of the world.

A key feature concerns geographic isolation, isolation from maritime access thus entailing costly - dependence on trade and transport systems of neighboring countries.

Many LLDCs - notably those without natural resources experiencing high global demand - find themselves marginalized from the world economy.

Along with that also limited global flows of knowledge, technology, capital and innovations. A consequence is the inability to derive sustainable development through trade. This all results in narrow production and export bases, leading to limited economic growth and persistent poverty and unmet expectations of young people in the LLDCs.

These severe structural vulnerabilities and limited productive capacities are now further compounded by the disproportionate exposure of the LLDCs to climate change.

Most LLDCs depend on a few primary agricultural and/or mineral commodities for trade. Almost two thirds of the population are still dependent on agriculture.

Many LLDCs are located in dryland regions where the impacts of climate change, desertification and land degradation are ever more pronounced.

Some 54 per cent of total land in LLDCs is classified as dryland. Drylands experience high population density about 60 per cent of the population located in dryland areas.

So, in the drylands settings where droughts and increasing decertification are now common we have pressure on the livelihoods of the majority of people and ever higher internal competition for resource access with all that this can mean for internal stability.

Then, we have the situation of the mountainous countries among the LLDCs.

Here, climate change equates with melting of glaciers not just leading to deadly floods and landslides but also important effects on water resources, destruction of key infrastructure, reduced biodiversity. This also includes climate risks for pastoralists and farmers in the
highlands and steppes. Bolivian farmers, for example, are forced to move their potato crops to higher elevations while Mongolian herders face losing their flocks to severe weather event.

As temperatures rise, the highlands of Ethiopia—which used to have a cooler climate and currently home to the majority of the country’s population, have become more exposed to diseases such as malaria—a tropical disease that was absent in these regions several decades ago. This effect is also demonstrated in the Andes.

Melting glaciers, degradation of wetlands and grasslands are clear impacts of climate change, which in combination with poverty and systemic limitations of Land-locked Developing Countries, in particular, contribute by compounding the pressures they face. 

Climate change will not stop and land degradation, desertification and deforestation by all predictions are here to stay if we do not act.

The UNCCD estimated that desertification and drought causes 12 million hectares of productive land to become barren every year.

We have 29 countries in the world that have people living on degraded land of 20 percent or greater, Almost 50 per cent of these countries - that is 13 countries are LLDCs.

According to FAO, between 2005 to 2015 - or over a span of just ten years - LLDCs across the world suffered a 11.6 billion USD loss in crop and livestock production due to natural-hazard induced disasters.

Such production disruption not only has a significant impact on national food security but it is a sure path to poverty and a sure path to NOT including the peoples of the LLDCs in the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Regional integration amongst countries is one of the six priorities of the 10 year Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the period 2014-2024. The actions of LLDCs include:

a) To promote regional integration by strengthening regional trade, transport, communications and energy networks;

b) To promote harmonization of regional policies so as to strengthen regional synergy, competitiveness and regional value chains;

c) To strengthen participation of landlocked developing countries in bilateral and regional integration frameworks.

These concepts would also be relevant and applicable to the subject of our side event this evening.

As a land-locked country itself, Austria as a co-chair of the Groups of Friends of LLDCs is an example of the potential and opportunities that LLDCs to be a progressive and developed country.

The Midterm Review of the ten year Vienna Programme of Action of Land-locked Developing Countries was held on the 5th and 6th December in NY. We acknowledge and greatly appreciate Austria’s role in co-facilitating the negotiations with Bhutan, which led to the successful adoption of the Political Declaration at the High-Level plenary meeting of the General Assembly.
The vulnerability of Land-locked Developing Countries to climate change is also stressed in the Political Declaration, including the importance of strengthening the resilience of their economies to slow onset events, such as glacial melting and desertification as well as risk reduction from Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and other climate-driven disasters.

Our office also stands ready to support the mountainous Land-locked Developing Countries in the successful accomplishment of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda in accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement to ensure that the peoples of the LLDCs are not left behind.

Thank you