



Statement by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

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

at the Joint FO-OHRLLS Briefing on the Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Security for the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS

7 May 2020

3-4.30 p.m.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen

More than half of the world population is currently under some form of social distancing to limit the spread of the COVID-19. According to the latest WHO figures, 215 countries, areas, or territories present cases. Millions of businesses have reduced or brought to a halt the production of goods and services. The ILO anticipates 200 million workers risk unemployment. Governments in Europe and the U.S. have engaged in unprecedented fiscal and monetary measures to mitigate the devastating impact that the crisis is having on workers and businesses.

The space available to LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS to face the unprecedented health, social and economic challenges that COVID-19 represents for our countries have thus far been more limited. As the economic fallout of COVID-19 unfolds and farm and food systems are affected in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, many more people will become poor and food-insecure. A global health crisis could thus cause a major food crisis and set back years of economic development and make several SDGs unattainable —unless the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS receive large-scale financial emergency relief.

To avoid the potentially massive increase in global poverty and hunger, we will need an unprecedented policy response. Development partners, the United Nations,

the International Financial Institutions, and other international organizations should support LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS to have the fiscal space needed to expand health and social protection programmes and mitigate the challenges presented by the pandemic. We should make an effort to strengthen, already in many cases, weakened food supply chains, and promote measures to facilitate access to affordable food supplies. Immediate and substantial official and commercial debt relief will surely be an essential aspect of a comprehensive support package.

We need to accelerate technical assistance, transfer of technology, and capacity building to scale up the capabilities of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS in fighting COVID-19. Overcoming the collective threat posed by the pandemic necessarily hinges upon the success of the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS in fighting it.

But even these measures are unlikely to be enough. There should also be concerted efforts to keep trade channels open and facilitate free movement of goods to avoid piling an unnecessary food price crisis on the current health and economic disasters facing the world. Large amounts of additional funding are required to prevent a large-scale food crisis and invest in resilient food supply chains.

Today's discussion will help us understand better the impacts that COVID-19 will have on the food security of our countries.

I am grateful to the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme for their availability to share their knowledge and expertise and to answer our questions. We will need their full cooperation in what lies ahead.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Chairs of the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS for organizing this event in cooperation with us and for their leadership during these crucial times.

I look forward productive discussions.

Thank you.