

**DELEGATIONS SEEK TO REALIGN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR WORLD'S POOR,
AS CONFERENCE ON LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES CONTINUES IN ISTANBUL**

**New Action Plan, Say Speakers, Must Outline Framework for Leveraging
Diverse Resources, Comparative Advantages into Stable Economic Growth**

Structurally transforming the world's poorest countries over the next decade required investing in national productive sectors, building infrastructure to boost trade and, for many small islands, adopting measures to cushion against external shocks that often wiped out hard-won gains, senior Government officials said today as the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries moved into its second day.

During the week-long Conference, negotiators are looking to build upon the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action and adopt measures to help least developed countries attain economic self-sufficiency, push back poverty and create decent jobs. The next action plan, many of the nearly 40 speakers said, must recognize the unique and varied challenges faced by the poorest nations, as well as outline a clear framework for leveraging their diverse resources and comparative advantages into long-term economic growth.

Its relevance, some said, would be judged by how well it addressed constraints faced by poor nations in integrating meaningfully into the global economy. Others said the action plan must leave no doubt that the main responsibility for improving the future lay first with those it sought to help and stem from a genuine political will to implement agreed strategies. Official development assistance must also become less selective and more predictable.

The road ahead would be particularly daunting for those still "smarting" from the 2008 global financial crisis, said Gervais Rufyikiri, Second Vice President of Burundi, who also cited unequal trade terms, high oil prices, limited access to agriculture inputs, unemployment and population growth among the factors that hampered progress. Many of the 33 poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa also were dealing with "brain drain", torn social fabrics and the plundering of natural resources brought on by political instability.

"Africa is not poor; it is the people of Africa who are poor," insisted Arthur Peter Mutharika, Minister of Education, Science and Technology of Malawi, who in spirited remarks urged the Conference to help African countries turn their resources into wealth and develop a manufacturing base so that people did not "drown in the Mediterranean looking for jobs in Europe". African countries and their partners must agree on how value addition would be accomplished and re-examine why the Doha round of international trade talks had failed.

For Tuvalu, such challenges were complicated by rising sea levels and other impacts of global warming, said that country's Prime Minister, Willy Telavi, calling on delegates to act quickly in addressing climate change, "to save Tuvalu and the world". Like many least developed countries, Tuvalu was not

(more)

necessarily suffering from extreme poverty, but rather from "poverty of opportunity" due to its isolation.

Broadly agreeing, Manasseh Maelanga, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs of the Solomon Islands, strongly supported the creation of a least developed country crisis facility within the proposed Istanbul action programme. Favourable market conditions that featured duty- and quota-free market access for all least developed country products must also be a key deliverable.

Presenting the perspective of a nation that had transformed itself from an aid recipient into a donor, Gordan Jandroković, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, said his country had first-hand knowledge of the complex ways in which development assistance could impact the recipients. Today, its official development assistance legislation incorporated lessons learned, in line with the principle that aid could only be efficient if paired with efforts to strengthen democratic processes and State institutions, and encourage accountability.

In a similar vein, Slovenia, which not long ago had joined the group of donor countries, had been working hard to live up to its commitments and, as of last year, started contributing to the European Development Fund, said that country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samuel Žbogar. Acknowledging that aid increase without aid effectiveness would not bring desired results, he said that the latter condition must apply to the entire range of donors, as the "development landscape" had seen many changes in recent years.

Welcoming that least developed countries had "shown the way" in negotiations in New York, Marie-Josée Jacobs, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of Luxembourg, said serious efforts must be made to achieve good governance at all levels, which itself must be part-and-parcel of decentralization policies.

Also speaking today were the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Vanuatu, and the Presidents of Finland, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea.

The Deputy Prime Ministers of Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as well as the Vice President of Yemen, also spoke.

Also addressing the Conference were the Foreign Ministers of Argentina (on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China), Saudi Arabia, Uganda, Morocco, Serbia, Estonia and Senegal.

The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece also spoke, as did the Minister of State and Special Envoy of the President of Algeria, and the Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates.

Also speaking were Ministers from France, Malaysia, Mozambique, Angola and Jordan.

The Government Counselor for External Relations of Monaco delivered remarks, as did the Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

A representative of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights also spoke.

(more)

The Conference will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 11 May.

Background

The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries continued its general debate this morning. The Conference, which aims to build on the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action – a 10-year plan to secure sustainable development in 48 of the world's most vulnerable countries – opened yesterday and runs through Friday, 13 May. (For additional background, see Press Release [DEV/2877](#) of 5 May).

Statements

SHEIKH HASINA, Prime Minister of [Bangladesh](#), said that while the Brussels Programme of Action had been "well-balanced" at the time of its elaboration in 2001, today, it is clear that there had been "mixed results" in its implementation. The least developed countries had achieved good progress in areas such as trade, investment and social development. It even appeared that some would achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, they had not recorded similar progress in developing their productive capacities, rehabilitating their infrastructure and upgrading human and social capital.

She said that their efforts had been impacted by, among other things, sudden increases in food and oil prices, climate change and the global financial downturn. Moreover, their development partners had failed to meet their commitments for enhancing support for economic growth. "Thus, some LDCs [least developed countries] lost their early gains, and others faced stagnation," she said, adding that the gap between those countries and the rest of the world had only continued to widen. Their fragility, structural weaknesses and constant economic marginalization was retarding their development and prosperity, with the numbers of people in those countries living on less than \$2 a day – at 75 per cent – basically unchanged over the Brussels implementation period.

"In Bangladesh, our aim is to convert our huge population into a human asset," she said, noting that, over the past decade, her Government had made some strides in reducing hunger and poverty. There had also been good progress in net enrolment in primary education, ensuring gender parity, reducing infant and child mortality rates, and providing clean water and adequate sanitation. Bangladesh was investing heavily in agriculture and rural development, transport and communication, among others. The aim was to "graduate" it from its present economic status and transform the country into "digital Bangladesh" by 2021.

As for her Government's hopes for the current Conference, she said that in the face of new and ever more complex challenges, time was running out for lifting people in the least developed countries out of poverty and underdevelopment. "If we wish the Istanbul Conference to be our last attempt to correct the situation, we must stop the rhetoric and honour the commitments we make here," she declared, stressing that such commitments must be accompanied by country-specific development strategies, a comprehensive development programme and a broad cooperation mechanism. The Conference, therefore, needed to craft a balanced, ambitious and comprehensive agreement that prioritized human resource development and emphasized quality education, universal health care and population management. In addition, food security, social safety nets and trade advantages and protections should also feature prominently in the outcome. "Global progress will only be complete when the 880-plus million people engulfed in poverty and underdevelopment achieve decent and dignified lives," she said.

(more)

TARJA HALONEN, President of Finland, said that Governments attending the Conference had an opportunity – and a responsibility – to renew their global partnership in favor of the development of the least developed countries and their peoples. Any political declaration adopted at the end of the week must make a real difference in the quality of the lives of all the men, women and youths in those countries. Finland allocated more than a third of its public development aid to the least developed countries and was committed to increasing that share. Five out of eight of Finland's long-term development partners were among those most vulnerable countries and his nation's share of resources earmarked for Aid for Trade programmes also targeted them.

She said that the least developed countries had set for themselves an ambitious goal for the coming decade: graduating at least half of those 48 countries from the category. "To achieve this goal, it is necessary for them to have good partners. As members of the international community, we should all do our share," she said. While the world had changed much in the decade since the Brussels Programme had been adopted, that action plan had brought results. "But we can do even better. More than half of the population of the LDCs still lives below the poverty line," she said, stressing that when actions in support of those countries were agreed, they must respect the principles of sustainable development.

In that regard, she welcomed the Secretary-General's creation of the Global Sustainability Panel, which she co-chaired. That body's aim was to identify new solutions for creating more sustainable growth models worldwide. "We must reach a balance between the economic, environment and social pillars of sustainable development." There was also a need to ensure social justice and gender equality. Empowering women was crucial to building a better world, but the resources to improve their lives and livelihoods were often "misused or unused". The international community could never achieve the goal of sustainable development without making full use of all available resources, human and economic. Only with such comprehensive efforts could the least developed countries leave their status behind. "All of us – the LDCs, development partners, donor countries, the United Nations, civil society, parliaments and the private sector – will have to make this change happen," she said.

PAKALITHA BETHUEL MOSISILI, Prime Minister of Lesotho, recalling that the objective of the Brussels Programme of Action – to create better living conditions for the millions of poor in least developed countries – had not been achieved, said "each one of us must accept their share of responsibility for the failure to achieve the modest targets that we had set for ourselves". Developed nations had not lived up to their official development assistance (ODA) pledges, while the least developed countries could have done more to integrate the Programme into national development plans.

He said that the relevance of the Istanbul outcome text would be judged by its ability to address the constraints faced by least developed countries in eradicating poverty, achieving sustained and inclusive growth, realizing the Millennium Development Goals, and integrating meaningfully into the global economy. The ultimate deliverable must be the graduation – of a sizable number of countries – from least developed status.

Over the years, however, the number of least developed countries had increased, rather than decreased, he said, noting also that the transfer and diffusion of technology had not materialized to expected levels, financing had fallen short of requirements and the private sector in poor nations remained so

weak it could not be a viable partner in development. The net result had been slow economic growth, punctuated by setbacks.

If that remained the status quo, there would be no hope of achieving international peace and security, he said, noting that South-South cooperation could only complement, and not replace, North-South cooperation. The Istanbul programme of action should recognize that least developed countries were heterogeneous, while ODA must become less selective and more predictable. Finally, Aid for Trade must be scaled up, which would go a long way towards assisting in the implementation of national development policies.

ADOLPHE MUZITO, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo said the results of the Brussels Programme of Action had been varied and related to the special conditions of each country. At the time of its adoption in 1981, his country had been in the midst of one of the major crises in Africa, with armed groups keeping parts of the territory under their yolk and the number of internally displaced persons jumping to 3.4 million.

Since then, the situation had vastly improved, he said, noting that elections had allowed for restoration of the Government's legitimacy. The implementation of a macroeconomic programme, supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), among others, had improved economic indicators. For the first time in 15 years, gross domestic product (GDP) growth was positive, and since June 2010, 80 per cent of the country's foreign debt had been cancelled.

Implementing that macroeconomic programme, absorbing former combatants and ensuring that refugees returned home – all amid fragile security conditions – required financial support, he said. The twin global crises of food and fuel posed additional challenges. His Government was exploring innovative partnerships related to natural resources, which were linked to reforms, including to promotion of foreign direct investment. "We think this is the best way to move towards increased growth," he said, adding that such partnerships required an ambitious vision.

He appreciated the regrouping among countries of the global South, he said, expressing hope that, against that backdrop, financial support and technology transfer would increase. Noting that multilateral organizations had imposed rules on States without taking into account their differences, he called for concluding the Doha round of World Trade Organization negotiations, saying that least developed countries also expected partners to enhance efforts for creating a technology transfer regime that respected the Paris and Accra Declarations on the efficiency of assistance. On climate change, African nations and small island developing States needed adaptation measures, with financial support from developed nations.

SERGE RIALUTH VOHOR, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, said his country had twice been recommended for graduation from the least developed country list, but had maintained its status due to its extreme vulnerability to external economic shocks and natural disasters. He was pleased to note that the draft Istanbul programme of action included provisions for a smooth transition period after graduation, which would allow least developed countries to continue to enjoy financial and technical assistance.

For Vanuatu, he said, tourism and agriculture were the mainstays of the economy, and the need for diversification was paramount to cushion against external shocks. At the same time, production and export capacity were stagnant, a situation exacerbated by Vanuatu's distance to markets, poor infrastructure and high transport costs. It would benefit from the Enhanced

Integrated Framework to support the formulation of trade policies. Appealing to developed countries for continued preferential treatment, he added that Vanuatu had concluded its accession package to the World Trade Organization.

Access to finance remained a concern, he said, and while the Government had developed policies to promote foreign direct investment, the need to mobilize development assistance to address structural weaknesses in the productive sectors was imperative. Graduation implied a gradual loss of benefits, diminished opportunities for donor funding, among other forms of finance, and, as such, it was essential that future development assistance target Vanuatu's structural reforms.

Urging bilateral and multilateral partners to consider making debt relief provisions for least developed countries affected by the global financial crisis, he also encouraged more South-South cooperation in such areas as capacity-building and agriculture. Development partners also should improve the quality of assistance in line with the principles of national ownership and as agreed in the Paris Declaration and Cairns Compact. New and additional resources for climate change mitigation and adaptation were also needed. For its part, Vanuatu was embarking on an infrastructure master plan. It also had allocated 45 per cent of the national budget to education and health, priority areas for which he urged continued assistance.

WILLY TELAVI, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, said that 10 years after Brussels, it was crucial to review the Programme of Action agreed there, particularly since many of the commitments made by both least developed countries and their development partners remained unfulfilled. As for Tuvalu, despite limited resources, it had been able to make some progress based on principles set out at Brussels. His country now was keen to work with other delegations in crafting a new development framework to assist the least developed countries as they faced emerging challenges, such as climate change.

He said that Tuvalu, as a least developed country and a low-lying island State, faced a unique set of challenges. "We believe that in addition to development issues, any new programme of action must address vulnerability and susceptibility to external and environmental shocks." Tuvalu had always depended on foreign assistance, but that assistance was being affected by the global economic downturn. Moreover, because of its geographic isolation, Tuvalu was also been dependent on imports. That had always been expensive, but with the recent run-up in the prices of food, oil and other commodities, importing basic necessities was threatening to drain the country of its national resources.

All those challenges were complicated by rising sea levels and other impacts of global warming and climate change, he said. "We must improve the LDC system to better address vulnerabilities"; the current graduation strategy did not cover underlying vulnerabilities. Thus, a more robust programme must be agreed to help smooth the transition to graduation. Developing countries must maintain and gradually increase their ODA levels. Sustainable development hinged on predictable financial flows, lest hard-won gains were eroded.

He reiterated that the international community must deal with climate change. Tuvalu had long made scientifically sound suggestions in that regard, but they had been routinely ignored in climate negotiations. "Time is running out: we must act quickly to address climate change, to save Tuvalu and the world," he said, adding that like many least developed countries, Tuvalu was not necessarily suffering from extreme poverty, but rather from "poverty of opportunity" due to its isolation.

(more)

ABDOU RABBU HADI MANSOUR, Vice President of Yemen, said his country had been forced over the past 30 years to deal with a number of internal and external shocks, including major demographic changes, water shortages and poverty. Yemen had been trying to build its institutions and strengthen democracy. In that regard, it had held a number of free and fair elections, even while fighting terrorism and dealing with the crises pervading the Horn of Africa region. Yemen had also worked with donors and the international financial institutions to implement its second and third national development plans.

He said his country, despite transborder conflict, lawlessness in the north and piracy in its neighboring waters, had been able to make some development progress. Yet, just as the global economic crisis had taken hold, his country's oil production had also decreased. The Government had pressed ahead with socio-economic development and had implemented plans to attract foreign direct investment. It also had enacted laws to battle corruption and promote open business processes. Thanks to the Brussels Programme of Action, real progress had been made in some areas. Nevertheless, Yemen's rural areas were still gripped by high poverty. The people there also struggled with joblessness and the high cost of food and other goods.

"We are falling behind," he said, calling for more assistance from "partners, brothers, friends, and international institutions", to obtain the resources necessary to reach the Millennium Development Goals, strengthen production capacities and enhance exports.

GERVAIS RUFYIKIRI, Second Vice President of Burundi, said 33 least developed countries were found in sub-Saharan Africa, an area that had enormous, diversified wealth. Political instability was a common factor among them, which had led to "brain drain", torn social fabric and the plundering of natural resources. Indeed, countries lost years of economic development because of war. Even social indicators like life expectancy and school enrolment had been affected. His country's 10-year civil war had only accentuated poverty. After it ended, the Government's goal was to restore peace and security. "Burundi is now a stable country," he said, noting that it was working to improve social and economic well-being.

Citing progress, he said primary school enrolment was around 100 per cent, access to drinking water had improved and gender equality had increased, with more women represented in decision-making, with women now accounting for more than 30 per cent of Government representatives. Burundi also had implemented several legislative reforms related to public finances, "zero-tolerance" for corruption – carried out by a special anti-corruption brigade – and promotion of good tax administration. The Government was committed to boosting the private sector's role in development under the "public-private partnership" label, and moving away from subsistence farming to "market agriculture" to ensure food security and combat poverty.

Like other least developed countries, Burundi was "smarting" from the impacts of the global economic crisis, unequal trade terms, higher oil prices, limited access to agriculture inputs, high unemployment and population growth, he said. Nonetheless, Burundi hoped to emerge from poverty by 2020 and attached importance to the promotion of investment in priority sectors, especially agriculture, energy, infrastructure and tourism. He hoped that the Istanbul Conference would translate commitments into actions, underscoring the importance of shared but differentiated responsibilities, with a view to ensuring equitable

globalization. He also called for the creation of a least developed country economic stabilization fund.

MANASSEH MAELANGA, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs of the Solomon Islands, aligning with the statement delivered by the global coordinator of the least developed countries, as well as the statement to be made by the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said the new programme of action must have the ambition and courage to graduate 50 per cent of the 48 least developed countries by 2020, as only three had graduated thus far. He was here to help create a new development path for those nations that recognized their unique challenges.

Against that backdrop, he noted with deep concern the lack of progress in negotiations on the proposed action plan in the areas of trade and ODA pledges beyond 2015. Structurally transforming least developed countries in the next 10 years meant investing in national productive sectors beyond 2015, with a view to achieving sustained and equitable growth. Building infrastructure to facilitate trade and creating regulations to add value to and improve the supply chain for national products was "a must" to achieve that transformation.

Favourable market conditions were also a key deliverable, he said, stressing that implementation of the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration on duty-free, quota-free market access for all least developed country products had not been fully used, owing to complex rules of origin. Thus, least developed countries sought simplified rules, especially as their share of global trade was a mere 1 per cent.

Those nations also were vulnerable to external shocks, he said, including from climate change, which had reversed gains made to reach the Millennium Development Goals. As such, the Solomon Islands strongly supported the creation of a least developed country crisis facility within the proposed Istanbul action programme. Also, least developed nations must be represented in the global governance system.

GORDAN JANDROKOVIĆ, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, said the Conference was a continuation of the international community's efforts to enhance global action to improve the circumstances of the least developed countries. "The need for action is as urgent as the problems," he said, stressing that despite the resources and energy already invested, the situations in the majority of those countries had either remained stagnant or worsened. In fact, the number of countries categorized as "least developed" had nearly doubled in the past four decades. The Conference was an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of nearly 900 million people worldwide.

He said that Croatia had successfully transformed itself from a recipient country into a donor nation. It, therefore, had first-hand knowledge of the complex ways in which development assistance could impact the recipients. Its legislation governing ODA incorporated lessons learned, following the principle that aid could only be efficient if paired with efforts to strengthen democratic processes, empowering State institutions and encouraging accountability. Croatia's development assistance prioritized needs identified by the recipients and aimed to promote sustainable development, good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

On another point, he said his country was "convinced that there is no development without security". Croatia, therefore, contributed to peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the least developed countries under the auspices of the

United Nations, European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organizations (NATO). Croatia would continue to scale up and enhance its engagement with those countries at all levels. The Istanbul Conference was an opportunity for all development partners to commit to establishing a new and effective international architecture in support of those countries. Such a strategy must be in line with the priorities of those countries and aim overall at reducing poverty, spurring growth and securing other advances that had not been achieved during the Brussels implementation period.

SALOMON NGUEMA OWONO, Deputy Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, said his country wished to remain in the least developed countries group until its economic and social strategy was completed by 2020. That two-pronged programme, launched in 2008, aimed, among other things, to wean the country off oil revenues, build productive capacities and promote economic opportunities. In that endeavour, the international community should help the country to improve its position on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index.

He said that three years ago, the Development Policy Committee had proposed to the Economic and Social Council that Equatorial Guinea graduate from the group. Yet, the country, largely due to revenues from oil exploitation, had only met the criteria for improving a few indicators that had led the United Nations to characterize it as a least developed country. It, thus, had requested the Council to postpone its graduation until 2020 to ensure that such a transition would not erase the small advances it had been able to make. In light of criteria set out in United Nations resolutions pertaining to such a "gradual transition process", Equatorial-Guinea had been granted the opportunity to graduate by 2020, without compromising its development goals.

He added that his Government continued to request the United Nations to allow it to remain in the "least developed" category so that that it could benefit from technical assistance, preferential trade schemes and other forms of help that would improve rather than undercut its chances for survival after graduation.

HAILE-MARIAM DESALEGN, Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia, recalled that the Brussels Programme of Action was adopted with "a good deal of optimism", which at the time seemed more or less justified. Over the past decade, many least developed countries had surpassed the 7 per cent growth targets set by the Programme; Ethiopia had achieved double-digit growth for nearly a decade. But the fact remained that least developed countries were not growing fast enough to achieve the necessary gains, as the global crisis and climate change were inimical to their transformation.

The lack of growth was a great concern, he said, as extreme poverty generated instability that transcended borders. While least developed countries must accept the primary duty to improve their conditions, "this is a responsibility for all of us", he stressed. Global imbalances were partly to blame for the sudden jump in commodity prices, while climate change and trade were other global issues that required global solutions.

To address those concerns, he advocated partnerships, as a matter of "enlightened self interest". That was why finding a more effective mechanism for collaboration was essential. All least developed countries should voice support for a new international development architecture, for which least developed countries must take ownership in a united, proactive fashion. Partners should respond positively on that point.

(more)

HÉCTOR MARCOS TIMERMAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said that as President of the Group, his country was working to find lasting solutions to development issues that would provide equal opportunities for all. While efforts had borne fruit, he was concerned that the 2008 global financial crisis had reverberated throughout the least developed nations, which had nothing to do with the speculation that had caused the collapse.

Adding insult to injury, financial corporations had recovered their earnings and were distributing dividends as large as the GDP of some developing countries, he said. In the aftermath, achieving even the more modest Millennium Development Goals was more difficult. Moreover, 41 years after it had been agreed, the pledge to achieve 0.7 per cent ODA levels still had not been met.

Against that backdrop, he called for a paradigm shift from a system that transferred resources from the global South to the global North, especially in the area of intellectual property rights. Indeed, while speculative capital was ready to benefit from the best profits in emerging markets, it was quick to take flight when situations changed. Such behaviour did not fit into the cooperation framework. In the same vein, the Brussels Programme of Action had not been fully implemented, and he called for structural transformation that would lead to negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

Developed countries also must invest in physical and human capital, he said, calling upon multilateral organizations to support the efforts of least developed countries. As for South-South cooperation, he acknowledged that developing countries were at different development levels, and explained that such cooperation was based on solidarity. International cooperation was an excellent tool for creating networks to ensure food security and he hoped the Istanbul Conference would respond to those demands.

For its part, Argentina planned to implement cooperation programmes in three key areas: public administration; human rights; and sustainable development, he said, noting that within that framework, it was contributing to food security in Haiti. In Timor-Leste, Argentina had cooperated in the area of human rights through forensic medicine training, and was planning cooperation activities with the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Palestine in the areas of public administration, agriculture and health.

NIZAR BIN OBAID MADANI, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, said that despite many agreements and commitments that had followed the major United Nations conferences and summits of the past century, including the Millennium Summit and the Brussels Conference on the Least Developed Countries, those countries remained at a disadvantage. It was regrettable that their people still suffered because of high unemployment, illiteracy and indebtedness, among other development challenges. "In view of the magnitude of these challenges, we need to consider and analyze their causes in an objective and thorough manner without confining ourselves to recrimination," he said.

He said that the international community had a moral obligation – and it was in the collective interest of all – to assist those who were unable to take advantage of the benefits of globalization and the "open-door policy" shared by a few. "Otherwise, their problems will be shared by us all," he said, emphasizing that unmet pledges, wasted human resources and degraded natural environments had led to instability, wars and conflicts in the regions of the least developed nations. That had aggravated their socio-economic challenges and impeded their development. He urged the international community to honour

its pledges "by providing direct or indirect assistance or waiving and rescheduling their debt [burdens]".

The developed nations also had an obligation to dispel the doubts and fears of the least developed countries regarding the international trade system by adopting equitable market rules that ensured access for their exports and by refraining from instituting unfair restrictions on the flow of trade, he said. As for Saudi Arabia's efforts, during the past three decades, the Kingdom had provided some \$100 billion in aid and soft loans benefiting some 95 developing countries. That aid had targeted sectors such as health care, education and infrastructure. The Kingdom also had announced its contribution of \$1 billion to the Fund to Combat Poverty in the Islamic World, and a contribution of \$500 million in "easy-term" development loans through the Saudi Fund for Development, for education projects in developing and least developed countries.

SAMUEL ŽBOGAR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, said the once-clear boundary between developed and developing countries was blurring. The right to development was among the basic rights of all peoples and nations, and while economic growth was the main indicator of development, it was crucial to note that non-income development goals were those lagging furthest behind. Given that, it was essential to focus on human development as the main indicator of development.

He said that while each country held primary responsibility for its own development, efforts of least developed countries must be reinforced with international cooperation, and partners must focus on delivering their aid pledges. Slovenia, which not long ago had joined the group of donor countries, had been working hard to live up to its commitments and, as of 2010, had started contributing to the European Development Fund.

Acknowledging that aid increase without aid effectiveness would not bring desired results, he said that the latter condition must apply to the entire range of donors, as the "development landscape" had seen many changes in recent years. Gender equality and women's empowerment were also essential. "Women, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, need to become active players and beneficiaries of development".

Recalling the importance of access to safe drinking water and sanitation and electricity, he expressed hope that the Istanbul programme of action would renew the partnership between least developed countries and their partners. While the traditional aid mechanisms must remain in place, the potential benefits of all aspects of cooperation must be harnessed.

HENRI DE RAINCOURT, Minister of Cooperation of France, endorsing the European Union's statement made yesterday, said the global crisis had shown that the end had come for unequal globalization, while the "Arab Spring" had revealed that the emergence of democracies need not be preceded by development. At the same time, "a whole chunk of humanity could not be left by the wayside," he said, urging that least developed countries be extended specific treatment. As fragile economies, it was difficult for them to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

For its part, France was the third-largest contributor to least developed countries in terms of development assistance, he said, noting that of the 2.3 billion euros extended, 55 per cent was spent in sub-Saharan Africa, showing the importance France attached to the world's poorest countries. It was important to take into account the local particularities of each country and

allocate resources on the basis of need, and not just performance. Subsidies and private-sector activities should be promoted.

Recalling that funding sources did not replace traditional assistance, but rather supplemented it, he discussed France's priorities, saying that least developed country trade preferences were being eroded and a quota-free regime would be a "real step forward". Ten years after Brussels, other partners must become involved in that initiative.

In the area of food security, he said the Group of Eight (G-8), of which France was currently President, was working to create a mechanism to address volatile agriculture prices. The creation of an emergency food reserve also could help in that regard. Stressing the importance of aid quality, he encouraged European multilateral development banks, among others, to consider least developed countries' priorities for financing on the most concessional terms. "We are fighting to ensure globalization is more humane," he added.

SAM KUTESA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, said that several least developed countries had adopted bold measures to address their challenges, resulting in some progress over the past decade. The Ugandan Government had made various strategic interventions to address some of the obstacles and bottlenecks hampering its development. Those included prioritizing energy and infrastructure development, education, human resources development, and modernization of agriculture. Uganda had established energy and road funds using domestic resources to ensure that, as it sought outside assistance, important infrastructure projects were not delayed.

He went on to say that Uganda was committed to enhancing South-South cooperation and was also deepening its integration within the East African region. Overall, African least developed countries were lagging behind in meeting many of the Millennium Development Goals and they continued to be marginalized in the global economy. He, therefore, called on the Conference to seize the opportunity to adopt concrete measures that could reverse that trend and contribute to structural transformation, improved competitiveness, sustained economic growth, job creation, and social development in the least developed countries. The programme of action must be about delivering effective support to those countries as they sought to modernize and broaden the productive capacities of their economies.

MALAM BACAI SANHÁ, President of Guinea-Bissau, said that although some least developed countries had recorded notable economic growth over the past decade, many, including in sub-Saharan Africa, continued to face serious challenges. For many countries, every year that passed put the Millennium Development Goals further out of reach. If the least developed countries were to attain those goals by 2015, they needed greater engagement from their development partners and broader cooperation among other developed countries. Along with increasing the level of ODA, South-South and triangular cooperation must also increase.

He said that while Guinea-Bissau was keen to work with other delegations to outline a framework that would ensure the graduation of at least half the least developed countries over the next decade, it was also aware that to make that happen, annual economic growth in those countries would have to increase dramatically. "A real increase in assistance from our partners will be necessary." Efforts by his Government to ensure sustainable development had been severely impacted by near continuous political and institutional instability since a civil war in the late 1990s. The Government thus faced

significant hurdles, not only to development, but to restoring dialogue with its international development partners.

Guinea-Bissau last year had concluded its Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) programme, benefitting from a pardon of a substantial portion of its debt burden, and since then, the prospects for the country's economy had been improving, he said. As for the future action plan for the least developed countries, the focus should be on improved governance, environmental sustainability, investment in agricultural, and improving productive capacities. The Istanbul programme should also reinforce South-South cooperation and bolster private sectors in the least developed countries.

ALPHA CONDÉ, President of Guinea, said that despite considerable efforts, in particular by the least developed countries themselves, the results during the Brussels implementation decade had been "mixed". There had been remarkable steps in peace consolidation, good governance, and education, but those countries remained fragile as millions of their inhabitants lived on less than \$2 a day and new risks had emerged, including strong dependence on external financing, lack of access to new communications technology, and climate change. "These challenges are without precedent," and the least developed countries were ill-prepared to deal with the resulting shocks.

As for Guinea, he said that while the country had made significant progress in some areas, economic growth of a mere 1 per cent during the past year was not enough to reduce the poverty numbers. Moreover, inflation had remained extremely high. Those challenges had encouraged his Government to pursue a development strategy that targeted critical issues, such as infrastructure enhancement and poverty reduction. Guinea's experience was similar to that of other least developed countries, he said, adding: "We are not asking for compassion, and least of all charity. We are asking to be able to compete on a level playing field with other countries".

Indeed, he said, everyone could win if the least developed countries had sound and committed partnerships to help secure their sustainable development. In the meantime, those countries should consolidate the gains made thus far, and, among other things, work to strengthen South-South cooperation and regional trade. He also called for a speedy conclusion to the Doha round of talks. The proposed Istanbul programme must be realistic and must be crafted with the involvement of all countries, and it must set out concrete objectives and a framework for follow up. If those things were prioritized, the programme would achieve the aims that had eluded its predecessors.

MARIE-JOSÉE JACOBS, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of Luxembourg, associating with the European Union, said that 10 years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, undeniable progress had been made, but it had been uneven, and at times, the Millennium Development Goals had been compromised. Luxembourg's cooperation programme focused on 10 partners, half of which were least developed countries. Its development assistance exceeded established targets, as the country bore in mind relevant cross-cutting issues such as governance and gender.

The quantity and quality of aid must go hand-in-hand, she said, noting that each country's development was its own responsibility and resulted from its own political will to implement strategies. Aid could only supplement those policies and cooperation could only "reap harvest" if based on solidarity and mutual trust between donors and recipients. For their part, donors must boost their ability to act quickly in support of vulnerable countries. Sectoral priorities must be defined and human resources strengthened.

(more)

Welcoming that least developed countries had "shown the way" in negotiations in New York, she said the challenge now was to devise actions to address the complex problems. Serious efforts must be made to achieve good governance at all levels, which itself must be part-and-parcel of decentralization policies. Luxembourg's development cooperation supported those nations that sought to strengthen institutions created in the decentralization process.

Finally, she said the fair and progressive integration of least developed countries into the multilateral trade system was an essential precondition for their economic development. The quality of ODA must be ensured. Luxembourg had allocated 1.09 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to assistance, 100 per cent of which was given as untied aid. "We are proud of this," she said, recognizing that it was not an end in itself. In fact, the aid dependence cycle must be broken and "for this we need to work together".

Noting that the graduation of least developed countries was secondary to their development progress, she said the transitional period was very important and a new generation of multi-year cooperation programmes must be considered.

TAÏB FASSI FIHRI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, said least developed countries had worked to break the vicious cycle of poverty, as well as promote democracy, good governance and the fight against corruption. But they remained marginal actors in the world economy, attracting little foreign direct investment and hampered by structural deficiencies that made reaching the Millennium Goals unattainable. Calling for more efficiency in United Nations development agency support, he also urged examining the extent to which partners had fulfilled their commitments.

"The situation is a challenge to us all," he stressed, calling on the international community to act against the political and social constraints that kept least developed countries off the track to prosperity, and support measures appropriate to every region and subregion. Through strategic partnerships, it must take initiatives that had measureable objectives and appropriate resources. ODA pledges must be met and innovative financing explored. Duty-free market access should be granted to least developed countries, as well as provision of new financing to cope with climate change.

Morocco, for its part, was committed to renewed cooperation with least developed countries, especially in Africa, he said, adding that its South-South cooperation policy was based on solidarity and mutual benefit. Human development was its main focus. Morocco had granted duty-free access to African least developed country exports and was working to establish a legal framework to speed regional and subregional integration through trade, private-sector incentives and public-private partnerships.

VUK JEREMIĆ, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, announced that his Government planned to deepen its support to the development of the least developing countries. For those countries to achieve meaningful, sustainable development, peace and security must prevail. That was why Serbia currently participated in four United Nations peacekeeping operations and why its activities would continue. For example, in Liberia and Haiti, Serbia had deployed military and police observers to enhance the respective security situations on the ground.

In the field of education, he said that Serbia was reviving its highly successful specialist course in hydro-technology, which had trained thousands of

experts from more than 20 least developed countries during the 1980s. Serbia would continue to offer hundreds of scholarships to students from member States of the Non-Aligned Movement. Additionally, his Government was also prepared to share its experience and best practices with the least developed countries to help them find ways to cope with the impacts of climate change.

He thanked all those who had continued to respect his country's sovereignty by not recognizing Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. He urged them to maintain their principled position on the matter, thus ensuring that such unilateral attempts to impose outcomes on ethnic or territorial disputes were not legitimized, thereby preventing Kosovo's attempted secession from becoming a "dangerous and destabilizing precedent".

URMAS PAET, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, said that while the Conference provided an important opportunity for stocktaking and review, time was nevertheless running out, as there were only four years left to meet the ambitious targets set by the Millennium Declaration. Achieving them would require strong partnerships based on a commitment to broad cooperation between the least developed countries, middle income countries, emerging economies and developed countries. The traditional multi-sectoral approach must be strengthened because all stakeholders, including international organizations, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society, had a crucial role to play.

In that context, he said burgeoning South-South cooperation offered excellent opportunities for economic growth, and he joined the call for emerging economies to provide their fair share of assistance to the least developed countries. However, as the negotiations stood today, the proposed Istanbul programme stressed that the least developed countries themselves had ownership and primary responsibility for their development. He agreed that while aid played an important role in ensuring meaningful global partnerships, it was a catalyst rather than a panacea. He added that his country had recently experienced a fast-track transition to a well-functioning, innovative and modern State.

He said Estonia knew all too well that building a State whose citizens enjoyed civil liberties and economic prosperity was a "painstaking task", which required firm and persistent commitment from both the Government and the general citizenry. Although Estonia had only been taking its first steps towards formulating its development cooperation policy when the Brussels Programme of Action had been adopted, it was committed to doing its share to achieve its goals. In that regard, he said that about half of the humanitarian assistance his Government had provided last year had been directed to least developed countries coping with the consequences of natural disasters. Drawing on Estonia's own experience, he said new technology had been key to fast tracking development and export of its e-Governance Academy all over the world, which had helped least developed countries build effective infrastructure.

THONGLOUN SISOULITH, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, said that most least developed countries would likely miss the 2015 target for reaching the Millennium Development Goals. The Brussels Programme of Action contained commitments to help those nations graduate from their status, but "we must admit that we have not lived up to our commitments". That unfinished business should not be dismissed; best practices and lessons learned over the last 10 years should be analyzed.

In Istanbul, "we should produce renewed and concrete commitments aimed at overcoming structural challenges," he said, noting that the new programme of action should be based on strengthened partnership and translate the Brussels Programme into measures that all stakeholders must implement. Further, it must recognize that the primary responsibility for development lay with least developed countries themselves. Partners should continue to provide support to minimize poor nations' vulnerability to external shocks.

For its part, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had made progress in recent years, he said, noting that since 2006, GDP had steadily increased. But the country faced challenges of high maternal mortality, low human resource capacity and weak infrastructure, among other issues. Reaffirming his Government's commitment to the Brussels Programme of Action, which had been mainstreamed into its development plans, he acknowledged the need to mobilize domestic potential for development and graduate from its least developed country status by 2020.

In the next decade, stakeholders must chart medium- and long-term targets, ensuring that more nations graduated by 2020. Only then could States be proud that they had achieved success. Developed countries must meet their target of allocating 0.15 to 0.20 of gross national income to development assistance. Commending the United Nations "Delivering as One" programme, he said that the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States should play a greater role.

ABDELAZIZ BELKHADEM, Minister of State and Special Envoy of the President of Algeria, said the Conference was taking place after an analysis of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals showed discouraging results, mainly because of an unfavourable global economic environment, a "drastic" fall in ODA, scarce capital flows to countries in the global South, and climate change. The picture was also marked by a commodity crisis and significant cuts in the budgets of United Nations specialized agencies.

He said that despite that situation, enormous efforts had been made by African least developed countries to meet the Brussels commitments. He cited, in particular, the launch of economic reforms. At the same time, the responsibility for managing world affairs was a shared one and Algeria could not accept unilateral decisions that condemned hundreds of millions of people to malnutrition. Least developed countries also were working to identify the basic needs of their people, but their prosperity would be mere a "pious wish" without concrete measures to meet their expectations.

Given that, the Istanbul Conference offered the possibility for strengthening the productive capacities of least developed countries, he said, urging that ODA be strengthened, foreign direct investment increased and debt burdens lightened. He stressed the urgent need for a controlled restructuring of the world economy, transformation of the monetary and trade systems and an accelerated realization of the Millennium Development Goals for those countries. Algeria, for its part, had always shown solidarity with least developed countries and promoted improvement in landlocked countries, as seen in its provision of financial assistance and delivery of food aid.

MAITHA AL SHAMSI, Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates, said challenges such as natural and environmental disasters and the ongoing economic and financial crisis had only added to the woes facing the least developed countries. As such, she called on all to find new and creative ways to achieve sustainable development in those countries. Impediments to its realization,

however, had left millions of people in poverty. As the implementation of previous action plans had fallen short of expectations, it was clear that one of the main tasks of the new century was to craft comprehensive follow-up mechanisms.

She said that the United Arab Emirates had been active in providing loans and assistance to many least developed countries. Her country's private sector had also provided assistance, particularly in infrastructure, telecommunications, and transportation sectors. It also had pledged to support renewable energy projects in the least developed countries. She echoed the sentiment of those who believed that it was not too late for those countries to realize sustainable development. What was needed was sincere and resolute political will by development partners so that they could overcome remaining obstacles. She hoped the Istanbul Conference would reach an agreement that contained concrete and comprehensive solutions.

NOR MOHAMED YAKCOP, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in Charge of Economic Planning of Malaysia, said that meeting the needs of all the least developed countries remained a global concern. He urged the Conference to identify more coordinated and comprehensive measures to help them achieve their development goals. "Let us join hands so that they can maximize the potential of the resources and better traverse the value added chain," he said.

He said that one vital key to the development of those countries was South-South cooperation. Malaysia reiterated its commitment to fostering collective prosperity with and among the least developed countries. His Government had, among other actions, carried out initiatives and training programmes aimed at bolstering productive capacities in many of those countries. It supported such initiatives in areas such as economic planning, banking and finance. He firmly believed that efforts to enhance South-South cooperation and to incorporate countries of the North should follow the triangular track and provide opportunities for pooling expertise and generating partnerships.

Development partners should participate in cost-sharing for third-country training courses, he said, adding that development financing was also important. In that regard, the Monterrey Consensus had stressed that lack of resources had stymied the efforts of many countries seeking to achieve sustainable development. As that was the case, technical aid and assistance should be scaled up. Any action plans crafted on behalf of the least developed countries should be specifically tailored to meet their unique needs.

ARMANDO INROGA, Minister of Industry and Trade for Mozambique, said the programme of action to be adopted by the Conference should ensure the enhancement of the productive capacities of the least developed countries, through increased investment in agriculture, infrastructure, energy, transport and communication. Those fundamental sectors, among others, would foster the necessary structural transformations to ensure the sustainable economic growth of millions of people. Access to affordable technology through increased assistance and transfer initiatives supported efforts to adopt national adaptation strategies to cope with climate change.

He went on to say that "we have no doubt that the main responsibility for the betterment of our future lies first in our own hands," and in that regard, Mozambique had used the Brussels action plan as an important tool with which to galvanize its efforts to address the socio-economic needs of its people. In fact, since 2001, Mozambique had achieved significant progress, particularly in the fight against poverty and in its efforts to promote sustainable development. During the implementation period, the Government had, among other things,

(more)

promoted an efficient public sector and approved a broad information and communications technology strategy that was being implemented with considerable success.

The Government had also made great efforts to bolster the country's private sector by establishing a more simplified licensing mechanism for small and medium-sized businesses, and extending financial services to rural areas. But despite such important achievements, prevailing challenges, such as the lack of adequate financial resources, weak infrastructure and vulnerability to climate change needed continued attention. Moreover, the impact of the global financial crisis had forced Mozambique to redesign its development strategies and programmes, and redirect scarce resources to meet the urgent and unexpected needs of the population. In all that, the Government attached great importance to the outcome document to be approved by the Conference.

JOSÉ BADIA, Government Counselor for External Relations of Monaco, underlining his country's commitment to least developed countries, said 800 million people continued to live below the poverty line, despite that the 2001 Programme of Action was an emergency initiative to reduce poverty. Unfortunately, 10 years later, least developed nations were still prisoners in a vicious cycle of low productivity and investment. Donors were still below their targets to allocate 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of their gross national income to development assistance.

He said that despite such cloudy prospects, the term "least developed country" was an expression only; one merely had to look at the resources, culture and will of those countries to progress in the face of difficult political conditions. "These countries are very advanced," he said, lauding their resilience and desire to present a vision of the future. "Not many other countries could say as much."

Monaco, for its part, and despite often limited means, did what it could in the field, amid partners that carried out "wonderful" work, he said. In line with Prince Albert's wish to see Monaco enter the "club of those most involved with solidarity" in achieving the Millennium Goals, the Government had met the 0.7 per cent GDP target. Its aid had multiplied seven times in 10 years, growing 25 per cent since 2007 alone. Twenty five percent of that aid went to least developed countries, 100 per cent of which was in untied funds.

In other areas, he said sustainable development could not be achieved without the private sector. Concluding, he said: "The international community must keep its word," despite economic difficulties. Against that backdrop, Monaco viewed itself as a "nation of solidarity" in today's turbulent climate.

ANA DIAS LOURENCO, Minister of Planning of Angola, noting that the Istanbul Conference would help "redefine the way we think and the way we act", expressed grave concern that most least developed countries had stagnated in almost all socioeconomic indicators. Growth in the mining sector had not been capitalized upon, nor had it created jobs or wealth, showing that economic reforms – whether in the public or private sector – had achieved poor results. On top of that, growth rates and falling commodity prices were forcing countries to find better policies to ensure sustainability.

She said that aid to least developed countries should focus on adding value and diversifying economies to address structural problems. For its part, Angola had made important administrative and political reforms aimed at consolidating the constitutional process. It also had resettled more than 4 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Least developed countries

should continue to incorporate recommendations of the Brussels Programme of Action into their economic and social sectors. Her Government would work to maintain at least a 7 per cent GDP growth.

Noting that Angola placed high priority on food security, mine clearance, health, education, governance, rehabilitation of social infrastructure and HIV/AIDS, she discussed specific programmes aimed at rural development and noted that school construction had increased enrolment to 6 million students. To reach agreed goals, States must be prepared to meet the challenges of climate change, on the one hand, and rising food prices on the other. A strengthened global partnership based on a better commitment to resources would help least developed countries reach the Millennium Development Goals and thus sustainable, inclusive growth.

YASSIN HUSBAN, Minister of Health of Jordan, said the continuing global economic crisis, rising food and energy prices and the impact of climate change had negatively impacted all developing countries, especially the least developed, where hard-fought socio-economic gains were in danger of being erased. Despite their best efforts, the situation of least developed countries continued to deteriorate and they lagged behind in their endeavours to attain most of the internationally agreed development goals, including those set out in the Millennium Declaration.

In that context, he said, the Conference must not merely review the status of implementation of the Brussels Programme, but it must reaffirm global commitment to address the special needs of the least developed countries and support their efforts to eradicate poverty and integrate into the global economy. The new action plan should chart the way forward and help those countries address multiple challenges, including new and emerging ones that had not been envisioned at Brussels. The success of the Istanbul programme would not only depend on the least developed countries themselves, but must be backed-up by supportive measures and policies that expanded the development opportunities of those countries. It would also require development partners to continue their support, particularly through scaling up ODA.

MADICKÉ NIANG, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal, said that, as this was the fourth time the international community had come together to craft an action plan to reduce poverty in the least developed countries, implementation over the past 40 years had not met the expectations. Progress had been slow and difficulties continued to hamper the development of those countries because, above all, there had been a lagging commitment to seeing through the past action plans. "So we meet in Istanbul on a less than jubilant note," he said, urging the Conference to "open the wound" and look closely at the difficulties and constraints that were undermining progress.

He said that if the international community really wanted the least developed countries to transition out of their current state, it must live up to the pledges that had been made over the past three decades. At the same time, those countries – 33 of which were located on the African continent – must continue to consolidate the gains they had made. To that end, his continent's leaders had adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a home-grown mechanism to fill in the gaps left by their development partners.

NEPAD, among other aims, sought to promote sustainable development, enhance governance and administration, and ensure progress on curbing infectious diseases, he said. At the same time, African countries would remain focused on conflict prevention, without which, there could be no sustainable development. As for the work ahead in Istanbul, he hoped that negotiators would "create a new

partnership, reinforced and inclusive, that will reduce the dependency of the least developed countries and decrease their number over time". The Conference was under intense media focus and the world was watching. Moreover, some 800 million people were listening and hoping that the Conference would find results that would end their misery.

ARTHUR PETER MUTHARIKA, Minister of Education, Science and Technology of Malawi, said he had come here with great expectations. "People expect a lot from the Government," he said, citing economic empowerment and political freedoms. He urged delegates to return home with concrete plans for how to empower their people. For its part, Malawi had set up a programme to ensure that rural people and youth could access economic benefits. The Brussels Programme of Action had faced difficulties and had been pursued amid increasing fuel prices, worsening climate change and a global financial and economic crisis.

Outlining his expectations for the Istanbul Conference, he said it must address those issues, which, unless resolved, would hinder implementation of the new programme of action. He also hoped that least developed countries' lack of capacity and inability to access both regional and international markets, as well as public and private capital, would be addressed, with a view to resolving those persistent problems.

Noting that Africa had tremendous resources, he said: "Africa is not poor; it is the people of Africa who are poor". He hoped the Conference would help African countries turn their resources into wealth and develop a manufacturing base so that people did not "drown in the Mediterranean looking for jobs in Europe". He added: "If jobs were available in Nairobi, Lagos and Accra our people would stay in Africa." African countries and their partners at the Istanbul Conference, therefore, must agree on how value addition would be accomplished, re-examine why the Doha round of international trade talks had failed and support the Aid for Trade initiative.

In other areas, he stressed that people lacked access to water because of serious climate degradation, and he hoped the Conference would devise viable ways to address that issue. Further, innovative development plans must be devised to attract foreign direct investment, while political and legal stability must be ensured. On that front, Malawi had created an anti-corruption bureau and an Ombudsman. He pledged that his country would be "in the forefront" of any new programme of action.

SPYROS KOUVELIS, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, said the least developed countries were highly susceptible to external shocks, natural disasters, and the impacts of climate change. As part of Greece's development assistance, it had financed adaptation projects in small islands, in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Those time-bound projects had been carried out in line with the fast-track initiatives agreed on last year at the Copenhagen meeting on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

He went on to say that the ongoing negotiations for the Doha Round provided an opportunity to, among other things, ensure that adequate funding was allocated to enhance agriculture sectors and eradicate trade barriers. The European Union had proved in practice its commitment to those objectives with implementation of its "Everything but Arms" initiative, under which all imports to the European Union from the least developed countries were duty- and quota-free, with the exception of armaments. He hoped other international donors would follow suit.

Another obstacle was the ongoing food crisis, he said. Beyond short-term responses, that trend called for increased investment in agriculture and rural development, especially since most farms were located in rural communities. The food security crisis also provided an opportunity for some countries to pursue projects that would help them "go green". Finally, he said the action plan adopted at Istanbul should form a realistic framework that was adapted to the priorities of least developed countries, but which reflected current political and economic realities. "We must adopt what we can do, not what we will do," he said.

GREG MORTON, representative of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, said the fact that eight of the 10 fastest-growing least developed countries were now fragile States showed that poor governance coupled with instability could not bring about sustainable development. Few disputed that real development was a multifaceted phenomenon, characterized by food security, gender equality and good governance, among other qualities. The measure of development was the degree to which poverty and oppression were reduced and human rights were respected; a narrow analysis focused on economic growth was destined to fail.

A human rights-centered concept of development also revealed barriers to overcome, he said, citing the need to ensure greater respect for self-determination; achieve a global commitment to oppose discrimination; and undertake urgent efforts to respond to climate change. Removing those obstacles was a moral imperative, as development was a human right for everyone. Least developed countries were "rich with potential", but their challenges had never been greater, he said, noting that many were dealing with the impacts of climate change, food shortages and disease, among other threats.

For its part, the international community had a duty to make the right to development a reality for everyone, everywhere, he said, underlining the need for an adequate enabling environment at all levels. Women's empowerment was also crucial in least developed countries, where agriculture was often the main source of employment. Globally, a commitment to solidarity must include fair aid, trade and technology transfer. His Office was working with dozens of least developed countries in the areas of peacebuilding, transitional justice, civilian protection and capacity-building, among others.

* * * * *