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Statement

by

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**123 Inter Parliamentary Union Assembly
Briefing Session: *Parliaments and the Brussels Programme of
Action: Looking Towards the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs***

4 October 2010

Geneva

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A good morning to all of you. It is indeed a great pleasure and privilege for me to have been invited to address the 123rd Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting on *Parliaments and the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries*. My presence here today is also timely as it provides me with an opportunity to share with you the progress achieved so far in our collective journey towards the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which will take place from May 30 – 4 June 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.

Allow me also to acknowledge the Honourable Vice President of Portugal's Assembly Mr. Pacheco, who has taken time out of his busy schedule to be with us today. It is indeed an honour to have you amongst us today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin my address today by briefing you on the current trends and outstanding challenges facing the group of 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

The good news is that for the LDCs, GDP growth on average in 2008 reached the targeted seven percent set by the Brussels Programme. This - might I add - is particularly encouraging given the difficult economic conditions which prevailed at the time.

However, when dealing with such a diverse group of countries, economic performance is always mixed. Findings in the latest Secretary-General's report indicate that of the 49 countries, just 11 LDCs exceeded the seven percent target for growth. Amongst the Asian LDCs, GDP growth slowed by almost two percentage points to 5.2 percent. A particularly worrying development was the steep decline in GDP in the Pacific countries from 7.4 percent in 2007 to 3.5 percent in 2008. This was driven in part by the increase in transport costs, and lower tourists' receipts.

Against this backdrop, food security remains a concern for the LDCs. Nearly half of the LDCs are considered by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as experiencing a food crisis requiring external assistance or being at risk of crisis owing to high commodity prices, which are likely to remain higher and more volatile than in the past decade. I have mentioned in various fora that this current state of food insecurity is untenable and requires an urgent need to focus our attention more on the development of the agricultural sector.

Distinguished Guests,

The reality is that there have been few inroads into overcoming chronic poverty in the LDCs. In the face of limited progress in reducing extreme poverty, there is a clear need for creating sustainable employment and increasing agricultural productivity. I should add that this should go hand-in-hand with increased measures to strengthen social protection, with a particular focus on developing human capacity in all of the LDCs.

I cannot sufficiently emphasize the paramount importance of building human and institutional capacities as these form the backbone for sustainable development. Commitment 3 of the Brussels Programme focuses on education, health and other social services. It is indeed a

positive development to report that most LDCs are making progresses toward achieving universal primary enrolment. The number of countries with enrolment ratios below 65 per cent fell from 16 in 2000 to 4 in 2008. However, there are some indications that the rate of progress is slowing. Undoubtedly, the effects of extreme poverty, which often result in child labour prevents access to education unless the education system takes the special needs of these groups into account.

One of the most serious impediments which I would like to draw your attention is the critical lack of productive capacity. Commitment 4 of the Brussels Programme of Action focuses exclusively on the structural transformation that is needed to accelerate development. It is startling fact that just 16 percent of the LDC population have access to electricity compared to 53 percent in developing countries. Twenty two percent of roads are paved in LDCs compared with 43 percent in developing countries and 88 percent in OECD countries.

This lack of key infrastructure creates a number of serious impediments to development in the LDCs.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Since the adoption of the Brussels Programme, the LDCs have made considerable efforts to mobilize domestic resources for their development to ensure the sustainability of funding for national development priorities. However, their domestic savings stagnated around 13 percent GDP. Most LDCs still face a huge financing gap, which is likely to have increased in 2009 on account of the current global financial economic crisis. The LDCs continue to rely on external financial resources, especially official development assistance (ODA) for their development. Net ODA flows to the LDCs, excluding debt forgiveness and technical assistance, in terms of volume, increased from 31.9 billion in 2007 to 37 billion in 2008. Aid distribution to the LDCs was uneven and some countries experienced a decline in ODA in 2008. Total ODA in 2008 as a percentage of gross national income was at 0.09 percent, as measured by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, is considerably below the target 0.15 to 0.20 per cent.

Distinguished Participants,

Allow me now to speak directly to the implementation of Commitment 2 of the Brussels Programme of Action, which calls for good governance at the national and international levels. We are all well aware that in most LDCs

appropriate institutional arrangements may not be in place, mechanisms for fostering leadership development are weak and participatory mechanisms for constituency engagement are limited.

Over the past decade, however, there have been incremental positive changes among the LDCs towards improving governance, and in particular, in efforts to promote democracy and human rights. Additionally, there is now a firm political commitment on the part of many LDC Governments to institute reforms that target corruption. Governments are equally committed to greater empowerment of their citizens in meaningful ways, and women are becoming increasingly influential in the political arena. As of April 2010, 16 LDCs exceeded the world average of 20 per cent women in national parliaments, with 6 even exceeding 30 per cent, which is considered an important threshold to influence politics.

Indeed, today, some degree of democracy exists in most LDCs. Elections are now the norm rather than the exception. And unconstitutional changes have been roundly condemned by the African Union, and participation by their leaders in AU activities has been suspended until the effective restoration of constitutional order.

The rise in multi-partisanship in LDCs has led to expanded powers and roles for parliamentary bodies. Following multiparty elections, capacity development assistance has been directed to develop constitutional provisions that acknowledge the role of parliaments not only as an effective check on the power of the executive, but also as an important mechanism to increase the inclusion and representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in public matters.

As a result, many LDCs have constitutional commitments to make state institutions more representative of the national social profile. However, significant challenges remain before parliaments in many LDCs fully realize their democratic governance roles.

Civic engagement with legislators and citizen participation in legislative processes, including efforts aimed at increasing citizens' understanding of the role of the parliament or how to access their elected representatives, remain limited across LDCs.

I should however mention that more parliaments in LDCs are finding ways to work constructively with civil society to create opportunities for people's engagement in the policy-making process. Parliaments in LDCs are increasingly aware of the importance of helping civil society organizations better understand their role through dissemination of information about the work of the parliament.

A number of parliaments have also played critical roles in post-conflict settings by bringing together and fostering dialogue among different parties to the conflict and restoring the rule of law. In such situations, parliaments can serve as a forum for starting a new political culture and dialogue between opposing parties, which promotes the participation of civil society in government and ensures the State's accountability to citizens' needs.

For example, in Burundi and Rwanda, the parliaments were essential to recent peace processes because they provided a forum for the warring parties to engage in dialogue and established a framework for restoring the rules of engagement.

Distinguished participants,

Since the Third UN Conference on LDC held in Brussels in 2001, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and my Office have established a fruitful partnership in promoting the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the 2001-2010 Decade, especially in the areas of good governance and capacity building.

In the spirit of this tradition, my Office has maintained that in the lead-up to the Fourth UN LDC Conference in Istanbul next year, parliaments should be closely involved in national and regional reviews of the Brussels Programme of Action. This engagement has enabled parliamentarians to better understand the key issues and priorities emerging from the process of dialogue and appraisal and consensus building. They have also been able to contribute their own ideas and perspectives in the identification of priorities for LDC development in the next development decade.

Thematic priorities identified by the LDCs during these reviews include food security, enhancing productive capacity, improving agriculture productivity, managing climate change, good governance, gender equality, mobilizing financial resources for LDCs development and the new green deal for LDCs.

Given the instrumental role that parliaments play in implementing international commitments, the parliamentary track of the UNLDC IV Conference will culminate with the organization of a Parliamentarian` Forum on the eve of the UNLDC IV Conference, on 29 May 2011.

It is envisaged that the Forum would help in strengthening parliamentary ownership and the proactive role in the follow-up and implementation of new generation of commitments and support measures. It is foreseen that at the conclusion of the Forum, parliamentarians will adopt a declaration that will feed into the substantive outcome of the Conference.

This, I believe, would be a most valuable opportunity for parliamentarians to draw up their plan of action towards enhancing the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the global action plan at the national level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Forging greater partnerships in the fight against poverty is an essential premise of the upcoming Conference. And much of our efforts in preparation for the upcoming Conference have been focused on building, expanding and deepening these partnerships.

From the beginning of this process, we have been firmly committed to a bottom-up approach starting from the country level.

National consultations took place throughout 2010 and involved a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The Asia-Pacific Regional Review, hosted by Bangladesh in January this year saw the adoption of the Dhaka Outcome Document, which was endorsed by ministers at UNESCAP's 66th annual session. The outcome of the African Regional Review which took place in Ethiopia in March was also affirmed by the joint African Union and ECA Conference of Ministers. Both documents stressed that implementing the Brussels Programme remains unfinished business.

My office, in collaboration with other UN agencies and international organisations, has scheduled an extensive series of thematic pre-conference events.

Before coming to Geneva, I participated at the invitation of Portugal in a meeting in Lisbon to discuss the way forward for financing for development

for LDCs. As you know all of these pre-conference events are expected to provide substantive inputs into a new Programme of Action.

The two sessions of the PrepCom will be held in New York in January and April of next year and will give us a clearer idea of the content of a New Plan of Action. In order to ensure broad participation in the conference, my Office is working with civil society, parliamentarians and the private sector, within the three tracks of the Conference, so as to thoroughly include their views.

Distinguished Guests,

Ten years after the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action, we are heading to Istanbul with roughly the same number of LDCs that began the journey in 2001. Only one country, Cape Verde, has graduated from the group during the last decade. Thus it is evident that a renewed commitment to the partnership for LDCs and a new programme of Action is needed.

It is apparent that the multiple challenges of poverty, food insecurity, global recession and climate change are all interrelated and in order to effectively

deal with each of these, more coordinated efforts are required from both the international community and the LDCs themselves.

In conclusion I would like to express my sincere wish that parliamentarians be fully involved and remain engaged in the implementation and follow-up of the New Programme of Action.

I urge you to continue with your good work in sensitizing parliaments on LDC issues, and I count on your support to ensure that LDC IV is a meaningful success.

Thank You