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Chair: Mr. Niang (Senegal)
later: Ms. Fisher-Tsin (Vice-Chair) (Israel)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 21: Groups of countries in special situations

(a) Follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (A/74/69–E/2019/12)

(b) Follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (A/74/113)

1. Ms. 'Utoikamanu (Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States), introducing the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024" (A/74/113), said that the report focused on assessing the progress made and highlighted the challenges that remained. It also contained recommendations for accelerating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action over the next five years.

2. The annual growth rate of real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in landlocked developing countries had decreased between 2014 and 2017, and was only 15 per cent of the world average in 2017. While progress had been recorded against indicators related to health, education, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the geographical situation of the landlocked developing countries required investments to be made in order to open up transit space to facilitate their integration into the global economy. In addition, the status of ratification of international conventions by landlocked developing countries and transit countries remained relatively low, with the exception of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade Facilitation, which had been ratified by 27 transit countries and 24 of the 26 landlocked developing countries that were WTO members.

3. Significant regional, subregional and multilateral initiatives had been developed to support transit, including a new customs code adopted by the Eurasian Economic Union; a transport and transit corridor agreement signed by Afghanistan, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran; the African Continental Free Trade Area; and the Agreement on River Transport for the Paraguay-Paraná Waterway, signed by Latin American landlocked developing countries and transit countries.

4. While some progress had been made in improving the quality of infrastructure to increase the connectivity

of landlocked developing countries, challenges remained. Although the global share of those countries in freight transport by air had increased between 2014 and 2017, their estimated paved road and rail densities remained considerably below the global average. The major challenges of inland waterways included reduced water levels during dry periods; silting; constraints in the development of port infrastructure; and operational, management-related and regulatory issues.

5. The proportion of the population with access to electricity in landlocked developing countries had increased between 2014 and 2017; however, those countries still lagged behind the world average, and the rural-urban gap in access to electricity and other basic services was still significant. The proportion of individuals using the Internet in those countries had increased from 17.3 per cent in 2014 to 25.7 per cent in 2017, but that was considerably below the world average of 48.6 per cent, owing among other factors to the excessive cost of broadband access. In addition, the participation of landlocked developing countries in global trade measured by their share of global merchandise exports accounted for less than 1 per cent of global exports. It was of concern that their exports comprised mainly primary commodities.

6. Trade facilitation was a key action area. The rate of implementation by landlocked developing countries of commitments made under the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation was estimated to be around 34 per cent, despite the wide range of measures adopted to that end. Another strategic action area was regional integration and cooperation. However, the average number of regional trade agreements that landlocked developing countries were parties to had increased from 3.34 to only 3.91 per country during the review period.

7. Structural economic transformation remained constrained. The average value-added contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP in landlocked developing countries had only increased slightly between 2014 and 2017, and 26 of those countries were commodities-dependent. Moreover, the lack of diversification made those countries vulnerable to terms-of-trade shocks and limited their competitiveness. While official development assistance (ODA) flows to those countries had increased between 2014 and 2017, and represented 17.2 per cent of total such flows to developing countries, foreign direct investment flows had declined from \$28.7 billion in 2014 to \$22.7 billion in 2017, and went mainly to the extractive sector.

8. Progress in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action had been limited. It was therefore essential to provide landlocked developing countries

with continued and enhanced investment, technical assistance and capacity-building support; increase cooperation between landlocked developing countries and transit countries; enhance regional integration; and mobilize additional financing for landlocked developing countries and increase efforts to address their internal and external vulnerabilities.

9. **Ms. Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that while the least developed countries had made progress towards the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action) in accessing information and communications technology (ICT), there remained significant gaps. Challenges and crises, such as climate change, natural disasters, financial progress regression and a growing digital divide were further compounding the structural challenges faced by the 47 most vulnerable countries of the world and posed a threat to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. The resurgence of economic volatility had resulted in rising debt ratios and debt distress, with total external debt stocks of developing countries and economies in transition as a whole more than doubling between 2009 and 2018, which had led to 12 least developed countries being listed as having a high risk of distress and 5 being in debt distress. While the Group welcomed the increase in ODA flows to the least developed countries by 5 per cent over the period 2015–2018, it was concerned that bilateral ODA to the least developed countries had decreased by 2.7 per cent in real terms in 2018, and remained far below the United Nations target of 0.15–0.20 per cent of gross national income.

11. The Group welcomed the offer of the Government of Qatar to host the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and looked forward to the endorsement of that Conference by the General Assembly during its seventy-fourth session. Thanking all partners for their continued engagement and cooperation in the build-up to the Conference, the Group reiterated its call for contributions to the conference trust fund with a view to enabling the effective participation of all least developed countries.

12. Landlocked developing countries had special development needs and challenges arising from their landlockedness, remoteness from world markets and geographical constraints, which imposed serious impediments for export earnings, private capital inflow and domestic resource mobilization. In addition, their sustainable development was affected by the frequent decrease in commodity prices and their vulnerability to

the adverse impact of climate change. The development and maintenance of transit transport infrastructure, ICT and energy infrastructure in landlocked developing countries were crucial in reducing high trading costs, improving competitiveness and enabling those countries to become fully integrated into the global market.

13. **Mr. Arriola Ramírez** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, said that although some progress had been made towards the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, one third of the combined population of landlocked developing countries still lived in extreme poverty. The timely and effective implementation of the priorities established in the Vienna Programme of Action was essential for landlocked developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Other international instruments, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, also played a key role in that regard.

14. The Group had identified several key areas for accelerating the development of landlocked developing countries, including the need for increased investments in reliable and resilient infrastructure and improved connectivity through ICTs. International trade was an engine for inclusive economic development and poverty reduction, so it was of concern that the participation of landlocked developing countries in world trade remained below 1 per cent. Although climate change had not been identified as a priority in the Vienna Programme of Action, landlocked developing countries were suffering from its impact on infrastructure, economic competitiveness and production, including with regard to food security.

15. The Group called on landlocked developing countries, transit countries, development partners, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders to actively participate in the comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. Only through improved and strengthened partnerships, alliances and innovative solutions would it be possible to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

16. **Mr. Amde** (Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that, while progress had been made towards achieving some of the goals of the Vienna Programme of Action, challenges remained. The GDP of the least developed countries had increased by 5 per cent in 2018 but was expected to fall

to 4.6 per cent in 2019. While extreme poverty had fallen in 2015, the number of undernourished people had increased between 2011 and 2017, and around 80 million people in the least developed countries were experiencing a food crisis. Current growth prospects suggested that more than 30 per cent of the population of those countries would remain in extreme poverty by 2030.

17. In a context in which an increasing number of the least developed countries were meeting the graduation threshold, the Group called on the international community to continue its support for those countries in order to make graduation sustainable and irreversible.

18. Although structural transformation was the central objective of the Istanbul Programme of Action, very little progress had been made in that area. The existing structural constraints of the least developed countries were further compounded by a series of burgeoning mega-trends and emerging challenges, including climate change, population dynamics, pervasive inequality, frontier technologies and rapid urbanization. With significant difficulties in addressing those challenges, there was a high risk of the least developed countries being further marginalized if appropriate policies and support measures were not put in place.

19. Climate change had already warmed the world by around 1°C. The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggested that an increase of half a degree Celsius in the global average temperature would have devastating impacts on the planet, with vulnerable countries disproportionately affected. Ambitious action at all levels was therefore essential to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Calling on development partners to fulfil their commitment to mobilize \$100 billion annually by 2020 through the Green Climate Fund, he said that the least developed countries had recently pledged to undertake ambitious climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

20. Although the Group recognized the recent surge in modern technologies, it was deeply concerned that the rapidly widening digital divide threatened to leave the least developed countries even further behind. In that regard, it called for greater access to and sharing of technologies.

21. The population size in the least developed countries was likely to double by 2050, adding an extra burden for them to provide basic services and full and productive employment to their growing populations. In addition, efforts to mobilize resources domestically were constrained by a variety of factors. Government revenue in the least developed countries had stagnated at around 19 per cent, global partnerships had been

under serious strain and bilateral ODA to the least developed countries had fallen in 2018. The Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development had recognized that less ODA was going to the least developed countries and African countries, where it was most needed.

22. The least developed countries had been unable to meaningfully benefit from the global trading system, and their volume of exports was far below the target of doubling their share of global exports. External debt stock also remained a major challenge, with five of the seven countries in debt distress being among the least developed. The Group called on development partners to adopt effective measures to cancel all multilateral and bilateral debts owed by the least developed countries.

23. **Mr. Phansourivong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the least developed and landlocked developing countries had made progress in implementing the Istanbul and Vienna programmes of action but still faced major national development constraints, including poverty, low productive capacity, commodity export dependence, rudimentary economic transformation, limited market access, transport bottlenecks, high vulnerability to external shocks and climate change impacts, and limited financial resources. The development of those countries must be accorded special priority, as such challenges were unlikely to be overcome without international assistance.

24. Recognizing the existence of development gaps within its region and the potential benefits of deepening regional integration, ASEAN had established the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 to foster regional economic integration and facilitate the free flows of trade, investment and skilled labour; the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity; the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan III to promote regional connectivity and narrow the development gap between ASEAN member States; and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, aimed at creating a deeper integrated and competitive ASEAN economy. To realize those objectives, ASEAN continued to promote economic partnerships with a view to integrating the region into the global economy.

25. Recognizing the vulnerability of the least developed and landlocked developing countries to external shocks, ASEAN had worked to address the issue of climate change and disaster risk management. In that regard, it highly appreciated the support provided by the United Nations through the ASEAN-UN Joint

Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management. ASEAN called on development partners to continue to support the mitigation and adaptation needs of the least developed and landlocked developing countries in order to address the destructive impacts of climate change on their overall development.

26. **Mr. Maslov** (Russian Federation) said that assisting the least developed and landlocked developing countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets should be a central focus of the international community at a time when economic growth was being suppressed by increased levels of debt, the negative impact of climate change, illegal migration, rapid urbanization and trade wars. The enormous human and natural resource potential of those countries could help to enhance global economic growth.

27. The Russian Federation supported the steps being taken by the least developed countries to develop and implement national development strategies and programmes in keeping with the Istanbul Programme of Action. A priority area was the strengthening of productive capacity, primarily by implementing structural reforms in order to diversify economies. That would help to increase employment and expand the range of goods and services with a higher technological component.

28. The Russian Federation attached a high priority to assisting the least developed countries and welcomed the holding of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2021. His country was implementing major socioeconomic and humanitarian projects in various parts of the world, including in the area of education and health care, and was increasing its supply of food, provision of trade preferences and participation in United Nations funds and programmes. It was also working on a bilateral and multilateral basis to alleviate the debt burden on the poorest countries. Last year, the Government of the Russian Federation had allocated \$1.36 billion to international development projects. Over the past 15 years, it had written off a total of \$20 billion in debts from the least developed countries.

29. His delegation welcomed the decision of the General Assembly to convene a high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in December 2019. It looked forward to a review in which constructive dialogue and exchanges of experience would lead to concrete solutions designed to accelerate the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Russian Federation had provided \$300,000 for the holding of events related to the midterm review.

30. The strengthening of transport communications was key to developing trade, industrial cooperation and exchanges in all areas. The Russian Federation was creating the conditions to improve transit, including by reducing prohibitive costs. Owing to its unique geographical position, his country was an important link in Eurasian transport infrastructure and was helping to establish a global system for transit operations through work with the United Nations regional commissions and other relevant regional bodies. Under the Greater Tumen Initiative, for example, Mongolia and north-eastern provinces of China would be linked to major transport hubs of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea.

31. **Mr. Mula** (Indonesia) said that, although the least developed and landlocked developing countries had made significant developments towards the implementation of the Istanbul and Vienna programmes of action, they were disproportionately affected by environmental challenges, health emergencies, natural disasters, poverty, hunger, youth unemployment and constraints related to trade and investment. A total of 30 per cent of the population in the least developed countries would remain in extreme poverty in 2020; their share of world exports had remained at only 0.95 per cent in 2018; and 80 per cent of the least developed countries remained commodity-dependent. It was therefore urgent for the least developed countries to make progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

32. Multi-stakeholder partnerships could play an important role in building productive capacity and providing critical support towards the development and graduation of the least developed countries. Support should continue after graduation in order to ensure that smooth transition measures were in place and to avoid disruption to development plans, programmes and projects.

33. Ahead of the midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, there were key challenges for landlocked developing countries, including their continued decline in real GDP growth, which had reached 2.8 per cent in 2016, and the fact that their share of global merchandise trade remained below 1 per cent. The midterm review provided a valuable opportunity for landlocked developing countries to take stock, share best practices and develop recommendations to strengthen the hard and soft infrastructure needed to accelerate their economic integration.

34. **Mr. Naemi** (Afghanistan) said that the progress of the least developed countries, landlocked developing

countries and small island developing States would offer the true measure of successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A balanced and integrated approach was therefore needed in responding to the development challenges facing those countries and creating synergies among the relevant United Nations agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, the Istanbul and Vienna programmes of action and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

35. The 2030 Agenda and other development programmes needed to be further mainstreamed into national development policies and programmes, as well as regional cooperation strategies. Infrastructure development in areas including transport, energy and ICTs remained pivotal for the economic development of the least developed countries. In that regard, Afghanistan and the surrounding region were facing a huge infrastructure gap that needed to be addressed using a collective and integrated approach. Investments should be directed towards the diversification of fund mobilization from private and public sources, including wealth funds, new regional funds, investment banks and innovative financing modalities, such as public-private partnerships and power purchase agreements.

36. **Mr. Monyane** (Lesotho) said that, with five years left for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, and less than a year from the 2020 deadline of the Istanbul Programme of Action, significant efforts needed to be made to support landlocked least developed countries, including Lesotho. The most vulnerable people and countries also risked being left behind in the collective efforts towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

37. His country had made some progress towards the implementation of the Vienna and Istanbul programmes of action by mainstreaming them into the Lesotho National Strategic Development Plan II and other policy frameworks. However, climate change was one of the greatest contemporary challenges and its unprecedented impacts disproportionately burdened the most vulnerable States, including the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. In that context, recurrent extreme weather events and natural disasters had hampered agricultural productivity in the reporting years, and the past four years had been the hottest on record. Lesotho had witnessed unprecedented spates of drought that had greatly affected the agricultural productivity of rural households, which constituted the highest population of the country.

38. The 2018/19 planting season had been characterized by late onset of rains, extreme hot temperatures and El Niño-induced dry conditions,

which had resulted in a 78 per cent decline in maize production and poor livestock body conditions that had compromised the quality of wool and mohair. The Least Developed Countries Fund under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change had raised the maximum funds that each country could access in order to achieve the full implementation of the Global Environment Facility Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for the Least Developed Countries, and his delegation called on major emitting countries to take further steps to increase their support up to 2020 and beyond.

39. Lesotho welcomed the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area and remained hopeful that it would expand international trade and reduce the high costs of trade, particularly for landlocked developing countries and least developed countries.

40. **Ms. Navaan-Yunden** (Mongolia) said that her delegation attached the utmost importance to the comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The global gathering should result in an ambitious road map and political declaration towards the full and effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

41. Her Government had taken proactive measures aimed at improving economic growth, expanding trade relations and facilitating access to regional and international markets. Under the Mongolia-Russia-China economic corridor programme, which was a good example of South-South cooperation, 32 major projects were planned in the field of infrastructure, energy and other connectivity. The Government had also made significant efforts in securing investments in the Central Railroad Corridor linking the three countries. The President of Mongolia had called for the establishment of a multilateral institution for electricity grid interconnections in North-East Asia, which would provide economic, social and environmental benefits to the subregion.

42. To contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, her country had developed a road map for cooperation with its regional neighbours to accelerate clean energy trade. In that context, it was willing to supply up to 100 gigawatts of solar and wind energy to customers in China, Japan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation by 2036.

43. Mongolia had contributed \$100,000 annually to the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, which facilitated global

dialogue, provided evidence-based advisory services and organized regional and international meetings and workshops. She called on Member States to support the activities of the think tank, and on landlocked developing countries that had not yet done so to ratify the Multilateral Agreement on the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries.

44. *Ms. Fisher-Tsin (Israel), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

45. **Mr. Al-Kuwari** (Qatar) said that the least developed countries had considerable human and natural resources to help overcome their structural challenges and to promote global economic growth. A large part of his country's international development assistance was devoted to supporting those States. Qatar looked forward to hosting the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, during which partners would make joint efforts towards overcoming the challenges faced. The Emir of Qatar had recently announced funding of \$100 million to support the least developed countries and small island developing States in mitigating climate change. His delegation looked forward to the comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which would culminate in a meeting at United Nations Headquarters on 5 and 6 December 2019.

46. **Ms. Hamdouni** (Morocco) said that the international community should continue to support the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States to help overcome their challenges, in particular those related to financial crises, natural hazards and the impact of climate change. Along with ODA, preferential trade conditions should be applied and concrete measures taken towards the effective integration of those countries into international trade. Aware of the challenges faced by countries in special situations, Morocco had invested in the consolidation of cooperation and trade links, and shared its experience in areas including infrastructure, electricity, renewable energy, agriculture, sea fishing and vocational training, granting scholarships and financing sustainable development projects.

47. Morocco had hosted the Africa Regional Midterm Review Meeting of the Vienna Programme of Action, during which participants had emphasized the need to build sustainable and competitive production capacity, diversify exports, establish sustainable transport systems and invest in the structural economic transformation of landlocked developing countries.

48. **Mr. Adnan** (Maldives) said that, while some progress had been made in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, countries needed to redouble their efforts to accelerate progress towards the achievement of its goals. Against that backdrop, it was a matter of concern that the number of donor countries meeting ODA commitments to support the least developed countries had decreased in recent years. The latter's increasing vulnerability to external shocks resulting from climate change and high levels of debt was also a cause for concern, in particular for small island developing States in the graduation pipeline.

49. While Maldives had faced challenges following its graduation in 2011 from the list of the least developed countries, it would always appreciate and recognize the partners who had invested in its human capacity and material resources. Similarly, partner countries should extend their support to countries on the verge of graduation and facilitate their smooth transition. In the lead-up to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, his delegation hoped that adequate attention would be placed on new and emerging challenges, large scale investments to build resilient infrastructure and accelerated action to reduce disaster risk in the least developed countries. There was an urgent need for more climate action, ambitious mitigation targets to achieve the 1.5°C goal and financing for climate change adaptation.

50. International financial institutions needed to be more sensitive and flexible in considering requests for concessional financing from the least developed countries and graduating countries and to better align their lending policies with the 2030 Agenda. The plight of countries in special situations required the careful consideration and continuous support of the United Nations system, development partners and financial institutions, as well as tailored solutions to address their needs.

51. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that many of the least developed countries were embracing graduation as a key objective in their national development strategies, and it was encouraging to see that 12 of those countries, including Bangladesh, were at different stages of graduation. Graduation of a country from its least developed status marked concrete achievements in its socioeconomic progress and resilience against shocks and crises, but there was apprehension among States that the loss of benefits would negatively affect their budding development. It was therefore necessary to adopt a formal mechanism to monitor the implementation of a smooth transition strategy for graduated countries.

52. Graduation of a country meant that it had achieved a certain level of economic development. Graduated countries should therefore be given increased access to regional and multilateral non-concessional facilities and foreign direct investment. The United Nations and the World Bank Group could support those countries in accessing private capital and investment, and credit rating agencies should raise their awareness of graduation. Given that local capital markets offered benefits to borrowers and investors, including Governments, the United Nations system could support graduating countries in building or strengthening those markets to enable them to mobilize increased resources domestically. The Secretary-General should advocate for improving access to finance for the sustainable development of graduating countries.

53. In cases of external shocks, including natural disasters and human-made disasters, such as the one Bangladesh was facing in dealing with over 1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas, it was necessary to determine how the adverse effects of such shocks on the least developed countries and graduating countries could be offset through redressal or compensatory mechanisms.

54. **Ms. Oropeza Acosta** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that she wished to highlight the Organization's role under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which had facilitated the establishment of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The Office allowed countries such as Bolivia to convey their needs to the international community and to jointly search for solutions and options with a view to promoting the economic development of their peoples on an equal footing with countries that had access to the sea.

55. The development of countries without access to the sea was limited. While many landlocked developing countries had made significant progress towards achieving unrestricted access to the sea, others had not. In support of multilateralism, her delegation urged compliance with the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, in particular its article 11.

56. For over a century, the economic and social development of her country had been negatively affected by the lack of proprietary and efficient sea access, and by the imposition of unilateral and monopolistic logistics handling of Bolivian cargo by private companies, with raised seaport tariffs and additional storage costs for Bolivian merchandise. Her Government believed in frank and productive dialogue

as the path to fair conflict resolution under applicable international norms regulating peaceful coexistence between States.

57. **Ms. Luo Jin** (China) said that the elimination of all forms of poverty was the primary goal of the 2030 Agenda and the biggest challenge facing countries in special situations. The international community should therefore provide effective financial, technical and capacity-building support to those States, while respecting their chosen development paths. Given that many of those countries were landlocked, which hindered their development, it was also necessary for the international community to support them in enhancing their connectivity, improving their infrastructure and driving industrial upgrading and structural transformation.

58. Trade was an important tool to reduce poverty and achieve development. The international community should therefore uphold a multilateral trading system with WTO at its core, safeguard the right to special and differential treatment of developing members, firmly oppose unilateralism and protectionism and create a sound international environment for countries in special situations to better integrate in global industrial and supply chains. In addition, global development partnerships should be deepened, with North-South cooperation being the main channel for international development cooperation. Developed countries needed to increase their input and fulfil their ODA commitments, while developing countries needed to strengthen unity and deepen South-South cooperation.

59. As the largest developing State, China had always supported the development of the least developed and landlocked developing countries, including by exempting those countries from matured intergovernmental debts; providing funding to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund and other international organizations through the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund; sending medical teams following major natural disasters and epidemics; and increasing investment in those countries.

60. **Mr. Madisa** (Botswana) said that landlocked developing countries continued to face many challenges, such as prohibitive trade costs, insufficient means to implement development programmes and inadequate transport and ICT infrastructure. Those challenges were exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change but could be overcome, provided that efforts to implement the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda were enhanced.

61. Botswana had made significant strides towards the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action by pursuing regional cooperation on infrastructure projects to improve the country's access to global markets. Completed projects included a highway linking Botswana to South Africa and Namibia and a bridge between Botswana and Zambia. At the national level, his Government was constructing and rehabilitating roads to facilitate the movement of goods and services through the country. However, like many other landlocked developing countries, Botswana would not be able to meet the deadlines for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda without enhanced cooperation and partnerships at all levels. Convinced that regional integration was imperative for landlocked developing countries, his Government had signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

62. One third of the population of landlocked developing countries still lived in extreme poverty. The comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in December 2019 should provide an opportunity to develop concrete proposals to accelerate implementation and reach those who were being left furthest behind.

63. **Ms. Chanda** (Zambia) said that while some progress had been made as a result of efforts by Member States to implement the Istanbul and Vienna programmes of action, much more remained to be done to eradicate poverty, strengthen capacities and address major impediments to sustainable development in the least developed and landlocked developing countries. Those issues should remain high priorities of the United Nations development system in order to enable those countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

64. Her Government had taken the goals and targets of the Istanbul Programme of Action into account in its national development strategy and had made notable progress towards achieving them. It had increased the country's electricity generation capacity by expanding its infrastructure and diversifying its sources of energy, with a particular emphasis on hydroelectric power. It had also improved ICT infrastructure, which had reduced the digital divide between the urban and rural populations and fostered financial inclusion. A liberal trade policy was in place and market openness had been increased through effective regional trade arrangements. Child and maternal mortality rates had declined significantly in recent years, and significant progress had been made towards achieving gender parity in

education. Her Government called for strengthened cooperation, partnership and solidarity through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in support of the development efforts of the least developed countries.

65. With regard to the Vienna Programme of Action, her Government had recently launched a new transport policy that would transform the country into a smooth-functioning international transit corridor. It had made significant investments in improving road, air and rail transport infrastructure over the past five years, although it continued to face challenges owing to the high cost of such projects, and was working with its neighbouring countries to implement mutually agreed transport rules, policies and trade facilitation measures. Her Government had worked to diversify the economy, which had previously been heavily reliant on the production of base metals, by promoting the development of the agricultural, tourism, manufacturing and gemstone sectors. It was also promoting industrialization, mobilizing private- and public-sector investment in strategic sectors and developing special economic zones and industrial parks. Zambia called for stronger partnerships and investment from the private sector to help developing countries achieve the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda in that regard. The United Nations system and other international organizations should also support landlocked developing countries in accelerating the pace of implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

66. **Mr. Almuzyan** (Kuwait) said that while a number of countries in special situations had made progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, it fell short of the targets that had been set, and developed countries had not met their ODA commitments. It was therefore essential to secure additional funding and transfer capacity-building technologies. Development partners should increase their efforts to help those countries implement disaster risk reduction strategies and mitigate the negative effects of climate change, including through the establishment of early warning systems.

67. His Government was committed to South-South cooperation and continued to meet or exceed its ODA commitments, not to mention providing technical assistance and soft loans to some 107 developing countries. Member States must make every effort to ensure the implementation the 2030 Agenda, the Vienna Programme of Action and the Sendai Framework, including by ensuring that the increasing financing needs of developing countries were met. Kuwait was committed to working towards a positive common future by helping countries in special situations to build

their resources and capacities. The time had come for the international community to take a new approach and comply with its commitments and the agreed time frame for the realization of the Goals. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States would have an important role to play in implementing that process in accordance with General Assembly resolution [72/279](#), concerning the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

68. **Mr. Idris** (Eritrea) said that all Member States would benefit from ensuring the meaningful participation of the least developed countries in shaping international initiatives and contributing to their implementation. Multilateral bodies such as the United Nations could become obsolete if those countries, which represented a quarter of Member States, were not actively involved in their activities.

69. Reviews of the implementation of international development agreements should not involve the negotiation of new goals; the ambitious targets set out in texts such as the Istanbul Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda remained relevant and efforts to achieve them should continue. A global compact should be developed to address the unfair international trade regime that undermined the competitiveness of the least developed countries through tariffs, export subsidies and restrictive rules of origin schemes. The least developed countries were also suffering as a result of draconian practices employed within the international financial sector, such as de-risking and correspondent banking. The transfer of technology and know-how should be effected in a manner that enhanced not only the productive capacity of the least developed countries but also their research and development capacities, so that they could develop their own solutions to local problems.

70. There was no one-size-fits-all solution to development challenges, which were generally context-specific. All States had the primary responsibility to formulate and implement coherent economic and development policies and strategies in accordance with their national priorities, and to determine how to balance the allocation of resources in the face of competing economic and social demands.

71. The international community had a shared responsibility to ensure that another decade did not pass without significant progress towards development for all and the graduation of all Member States currently in

the least developed country category. It was only fair that the States that commanded the most resources should bear the greatest responsibility for ensuring that international commitments to the least developed countries were fulfilled. The development of those countries would benefit all States by enabling the implementation of sustainable solutions to global problems.

72. **Mr. Sharif** (Sudan) said that progress on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals had been slow. People in the least developed countries bore a disproportionate share of the suffering, and international efforts to help them were not ambitious enough. The principle of multilateralism, which underpinned the implementation of international agreements, had also come under strain. Although the least developed countries had made considerable efforts to achieve the objectives of the Istanbul Programme of Action by the target date of 2020, those countries and their development partners alike needed to step up their efforts. A range of structural challenges remained in place, including narrow production and export bases, stagnant trade and investment flows, stalling productivity, inadequate management of land and natural resources, and widespread poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Those factors had been exacerbated by climate change, natural disasters, public health emergencies, conflicts, falling commodity prices and growing capital outflows. Absent structural change, the least developed countries would remain vulnerable to economic, social and environmental shocks.

73. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, which should help to build technical capacities in the least developed countries and promote structural transformation. It hoped that the allies and development partners of the Sudan would assist it as it embarked on a new phase of its political history in pursuit of prosperity and comprehensive economic development.

74. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that as a landlocked least developed country, Bhutan was concerned about declining ODA, reduced foreign direct investment, the increasing economic uncertainty caused by trade tensions and the surge in measures to restrict trade. There was an urgent need for new approaches based on the principles of shared responsibility and leaving no one behind.

75. While climate change posed a threat to all humanity, the first in the line of fire were the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, which were already grappling with the disproportionate and devastating

impact of that existential threat on a daily basis. Bhutan continued to demonstrate great ambition and resolve in its efforts to combat climate change, like other vulnerable States that had contributed the least to its causes, and was currently the only carbon-negative country in the world. Development partners and the international community as a whole must shoulder their fair share of the collective responsibility to combat the global crisis.

76. Bhutan had participated actively in the preparations for the high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The review and the political declaration that would be adopted as its outcome should provide the necessary impetus to accelerate work on the issues identified as priorities for the next five years. Much work remained to be done to achieve the goal set out in the Istanbul Programme of Action of enabling half of the least developed countries to graduate from least developed country status by 2020. Bhutan looked forward to graduating in 2023, in accordance with the schedule endorsed by the General Assembly in 2018, and had developed a plan to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition.

77. **Mr. Issetov** (Kazakhstan) said that as a result of being isolated from major centres of economic activity and reliant on neighbouring countries for the transit of goods, landlocked developing countries accounted for less than 1 per cent of global exports. The least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States suffered from underdeveloped transport infrastructure and high trade costs and were also most severely affected by climate change and the global economic crisis. The current low level of regional cooperation was hindering their progress and must be addressed. A determined partnership for action among States in those three categories would be valuable in addressing the different challenges they faced.

78. The implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action should be an integral element of the implementation of such important international agreements as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. The private sector should also play a leading role in investment in economic infrastructure, and his delegation called for enhanced coordination between the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, the World Bank and private investors in that regard. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the Global Investors for

Sustainable Development Alliance, which should help to attract much-needed resources to countries that were lagging behind.

79. The twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference, which would be hosted by Kazakhstan in 2020, would provide an opportunity for landlocked developing countries to speak with one voice about the challenges they faced and advocate the consideration of their interests in global trade policy. Trade facilitation measures and the diversification of international transport corridors played a crucial role in the development of the transport and logistics systems of landlocked developing countries. In that connection, his Government had reduced the transit time of goods through Kazakhstan to between 13 and 15 days and had vastly improved import, export and transit operations through the development of an automated customs administration programme, in cooperation with UNCTAD. Kazakhstan stood ready to share its experience in that regard.

80. It would not be possible to implement the Vienna Programme of Action or the 2030 Agenda on time at the current pace of progress. The midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action must therefore culminate in the adoption of an ambitious outcome document that would ensure the provision of meaningful assistance for landlocked developing countries to build their productive capacities, expand their trade potential, generate more opportunities for decent work, eradicate poverty and address inequalities.

81. **Mr. Bhandari** (Nepal) said that there was a need for more focused action to promote structural transformation in the least developed countries. The international community was not even halfway to meeting the goal of enabling half of the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020. The increasing trade tensions not only undermined the principle of a rules-based and fair global trading regime but also had the greatest impact on those who were already the furthest behind. It was also crucial to address the technological divide, another major factor underpinning the development divide. In that connection, his Government welcomed the establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries.

82. The slow pace of implementation of commitments under the Istanbul Programme of Action called for reflection, new targeted efforts and increased cooperation. It must be borne in mind that the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda largely depended on the results achieved in the least developed countries. The support provided should be aligned with the

priorities of the recipient country, and there should be a focus on building productive capacity.

83. Nepal had met two of the three criteria for graduation from least developed country status but was struggling to meet the per capita income criterion. It was therefore intensifying its development efforts to ensure a sustainable graduation process, with the longer-term goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2030. To that end, it was working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and establish balanced and robust economic development. Enhanced, predictable and continued support for the least developed countries would ensure smooth and sustainable transitions from least developed country status.

84. Landlocked least developed countries faced a compounded set of challenges, which were further aggravated by disasters and climate change. His delegation called for the full, timely and effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the provision of adequate support to the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries. All countries in special situations required enhanced international support to ensure that they received the financing and investment they required to overcome challenges related to poor infrastructure, narrow production and export bases, poor capital formation and low factor productivity.

85. **Mr. Maung** (Myanmar) said that the least developed countries were the most affected by trade tensions, the decline in economic growth, increasing inequality, unemployment, the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters. The Istanbul Programme of Action could not be implemented unless action was taken to enable the least developed countries to address such challenges. In that connection, his Government encouraged donor countries to fulfil their ODA commitments and invited organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, WTO and UNCTAD to help the least developed countries overcome the basic challenges they faced.

86. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries and encouraged donor countries to provide the financial support necessary to make it operational. Development partners were also encouraged to support the development of the energy sectors of the least developed countries, since most had limited access to electricity despite being rich in renewable sources of energy. There was also a need to foster an enabling environment for private-sector investment in infrastructure, which was still rare in those countries.

87. Despite the challenges they faced, the least developed countries had been working hard to implement the Istanbul Programme of Action, with support from their development partners. As a result, a number of them, including Myanmar, had now met the criteria for graduation. His Government had incorporated the targets of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals into its national sustainable development plan for the period 2018–2030 and had adopted economic reforms that had led to rapid economic growth. Myanmar had now met all the criteria for graduation from the least developed country category and was intensifying its development efforts to build a foundation for sustainable graduation. The next programme of action for the least developed countries should be based on the experience, best practices and lessons learned from the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Transformation and innovation were needed in order to enhance partnerships and speed up, step up and scale up efforts to ensure sustainable development for all.

88. **Mr. Varli** (Turkey) said that an estimated 2 million children had died in the least developed countries in 2017, primarily from preventable causes, and the mortality rate of children under 5 years of age was expected to increase in the coming decades. Such facts should impel the international community to take more decisive and concerted action to tackle the complex structural challenges preventing sustainable development in the least developed countries. Those countries should also be given particular attention in poverty eradication efforts under the 2030 Agenda. Inclusive structural transformation was the best path to prosperity, as it laid the foundation for actions to address unemployment, the lack of decent work and low household incomes. The least developed countries should strengthen their strategies to transform economic structures, promote inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth, create employment and enhance their social protection systems. The majority had already made progress in that regard by taking the Istanbul Programme of Action into account in their national plans and strategies.

89. Ensuring that no one was left behind was a priority for his Government, which had accordingly provided \$350 million in ODA to the least developed countries since 2011. In 2018, Turkey had been one of the few countries to fulfil the target of contributing 0.7 per cent of its gross national income as ODA. His delegation called on the international community to fulfil their ODA and trade commitments to provide the least developed countries with the means to finance development and increase their resilience to global

economic shocks. Investment in science, technology and innovation and efforts to bridge the growing technology gap were also crucial to sustainable development in those countries.

90. The Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries was helping those countries to strengthen their technological capacities and manage matters concerning intellectual property rights. It also promoted the development and implementation of national and regional science, technology and innovation strategies and the strengthening of partnerships among public and private stakeholders in the technology sector. However, the Technology Bank was currently underfunded, and a lack of multi-year funding commitments made strategic planning impossible. His delegation therefore called on all development partners to provide adequate and predictable funding for the Technology Bank. The least developed countries, their development partners and the United Nations system should enhance their efforts to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda, in order to ensure the eradication of poverty by 2030.

91. **Mr. Malik** (India) said that not all countries had shared equally in the socioeconomic progress that the world had witnessed over the past few decades. The least developed countries continued to face challenges related to resource mobilization, capacity and access to technology and were more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, natural disasters and communicable diseases. The particular challenges faced by landlocked countries hindered their economic growth and sustainable development. They not only faced geographic obstacles to trade but also found it more difficult to attract public and private investment owing to perceived macroeconomic, regulatory and market risks.

92. His country remained fully committed to providing support to and sharing its experience with the least developed and landlocked developing countries. It had contributed to the preparations for the reviews of the implementation of the Istanbul and Vienna programmes of action and had long participated in development partnerships focused on capacity-building, financial assistance, infrastructure development and the sharing of technological expertise to promote long-term sustainability. It had established the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund in 2017 and had committed to provide \$176 million through the Fund over the next decade to finance development projects in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. India, Brazil and South Africa also had an active partnership

in the form of a trust fund with UNDP to assist developing countries. India was further developing its relationships with other developing countries through the India-Africa Forum Summit and the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation and would participate actively in the preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. It had also contributed to the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries.

93. **Ms. Carpentier** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) said that economic structural transformation – meaning the transfer of production factors, in particular land, labour and capital, from activities and sectors with low productivity and value added to those with higher productivity and value added – was important for eradicating poverty and ensuring long-term development in developing countries. Radical economic transformation was particularly urgent in the least developed countries, which would have to increase their productive capacities at an unprecedented speed in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the context of the current digital transformation and rapid reorientation of global production. Moreover, the least developed countries were expected to transform their economies beginning from a vulnerable starting point while avoiding the negative societal and environmental effects that had resulted from development in countries that had gone through that process earlier.

94. UNCTAD had developed a concise, user-friendly compendium of policy guidance on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, on the basis of its work for and with the least developed countries. *The Least Developed Countries Report 2018* of UNCTAD had set out a compelling case for a structural transformation-focused approach to entrepreneurship policy in the least developed countries. Such policies should foster linkages between businesses of different sizes, stages of maturity and sectors in order to ensure a sustained flow of new ideas. In its report, UNCTAD had also called for greater attention to be given to the development of domestic supply chains, since linking the least developed countries to global value chains had not significantly increased entrepreneurship at the local level. Those countries should focus on supporting domestic entrepreneurs and established businesses delivering innovative products and services, which would produce a ripple effect through the economy. In its analogous 2017 report, UNCTAD had noted that the pattern of energy use in the least developed countries was skewed towards households and had emphasized the importance of ensuring that industry, agriculture and high-value services sectors had adequate access to

energy. The productive use of energy made investment in electricity generation and distribution economically viable.

95. The midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action should result in a concrete, measurable and forward-looking outcome that would reinvigorate the global commitment to helping landlocked developing countries overcome the challenges they faced. In preparation for the review, UNCTAD had already supported events in Africa and Asia that had provided opportunities to consider the progress achieved thus far and identify regional priorities for the review.

96. **Ms. Linke Heep** (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) said that the slow progress made towards implementing the Vienna Programme of Action was evidenced by the decline in economic growth and participation in international trade in landlocked developing countries. Those States faced difficulties in accessing markets not only because of their distance from the sea but also because of their inability to meet market quality standard requirements. It was important to accelerate structural change in those countries by reallocating labour from low-productivity to high-productivity sectors and to take the necessary actions with regard to technology transfer, innovation and knowledge management to enable them to enjoy inclusive and sustainable growth.

97. UNIDO provided technical assistance aimed at strengthening regional economic integration and trade through compliance with international trade rules and regulations. It had a specific programme in place to help States achieve compliance with the necessary international safety norms and quality requirements for the export of certain products. UNIDO also provided technology transfer services and policy advice concerning the promotion of innovation and institutional capacity-building with a view to ensuring industrial competitiveness.

98. UNIDO also helped landlocked developing countries to pursue inclusive and sustainable industrialization, structural change and economic growth through its Programme for Country Partnership, an innovative initiative designed to accelerate inclusive and sustainable industrial development in accordance with national priorities. One element of the Programme involved mobilizing partnerships and resources for investment in priority sectors identified by the Government of the country concerned. UNIDO had also been instrumental in the establishment of industrial parks in a number of landlocked developing countries, thereby enhancing their ability to attract investment, create jobs and foster technological learning and

innovation. UNIDO would continue to cooperate with development partners and other stakeholders to ensure that landlocked developing countries were not left behind.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.