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Chair: Mr. Amorín (Uruguay)
later: Mr. Cimino (Italy)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 20: Groups of countries in special situations

(a) Follow-up to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (A/78/112-E/2023/94, A/77/984 and A/78/367)

(b) Follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (A/78/283)

1. **Ms. Fatima** (High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (A/78/112-E/2023/94), said that, at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the least developed countries were not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and urgent action was therefore required by the global community. The report provided updates on the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, as well as recommendations for action.

2. Food insecurity had been rising since 2019, with more than one third of food-insecure people currently living in the least developed countries. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States was preparing a separate report in response to the Secretary-General's request for the operationalization of a food stockholding system. Furthermore, with 22 per cent of primary schoolchildren in the least developed countries not in school, access to quality education was vital; increasing access to tertiary education was also a major challenge.

3. The Office was preparing a feasibility study on an online university to leverage the potential of online platforms to advance science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the least developed countries. Furthermore, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had affected the fiscal and financial situation in the least developed countries, with 21 currently in debt distress or at high risk of it. Foreign direct investment (FDI) had decreased by 14 per cent from 2021 to 2022. Increasing investment was key to achieving a post-pandemic recovery as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Office was assessing the feasibility of both an international investment support centre and a sustainable graduation support facility. A report was also being prepared on multi-hazard early warning systems to support

resilience-building measures. The Office welcomed the recently announced relaunch of a board of advisers for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the declaration adopted at the recent annual ministerial meeting of the least developed countries.

4. Introducing the report of the Secretary-General on ensuring the effective implementation of the functions of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (A/77/984), she said that the report provided an assessment of the effectiveness of United Nations system support to the least developed countries and of the Office's evolving mandates. Although the World Bank did not recognize the least developed country category, the United Nations development system provided increasingly robust support to those countries, with more than half of total country expenditure earmarked for them. However, support for graduating or graduated countries and the phasing out of specific benefits was often reviewed on a case-by-case basis and not with an institutional approach. The Office's recommendations included the following: the United Nations should scale up substantive and technical assistance in a timely, long-term, predictable and flexible manner; the United Nations development system should develop internal guidelines on how to turn least developed country priorities into budget allocations and capacity development projects; and organizations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, should recognize the least developed country category and implement tailored programmes to ensure coherent and consistent global support for the most vulnerable countries.

5. The Office's responsibilities had increased significantly in scope and complexity since it had been created. Its new mandated activities included the provision of substantive and technical support to countries in special situations to implement the 2030 Agenda and their programmes of action; national follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the programmes of action; monitoring of sectoral policy development and the intergovernmental processes of international and regional organizations; substantive technical support for groups of countries in special situations; research and analysis to facilitate science- and evidence-based decisions; and detailed mapping exercises and feasibility studies on the five key deliverables of the Doha Programme of Action. The Secretary-General therefore recommended that the Office's capacity and functions be strengthened and that the General Assembly endorse the proposal.

6. Introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 (A/78/283), she said that landlocked developing countries faced many interconnected and complex challenges. Their average growth rate, measured in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), had fallen from approximately 6.8 per cent in the period from 2000 to 2014 to 3.4 per cent in the period from 2015 to 2023. Poverty levels had declined but were still higher than the global average. The Human Development Index value had fallen from 0.605 in 2019 to 0.597 in 2021, and the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity had increased from approximately 43 per cent in 2015 to 58 per cent in 2022.

7. There had, however, been some progress. Regional, subregional and multilateral policy initiatives had been developed to support transit, but the capacity of landlocked developing countries to implement policies was limited and they lacked adequate transport infrastructure. About 40 per cent of people in such countries still had no access to electricity and, although Internet use has risen to about 32 per cent of their population in 2021, it was still far behind the global average of 63 per cent. The share of exports of goods and services had not changed significantly, with a negative trade balance recorded since 2015, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions. There had been limited progress in achieving structural economic transformation, with merchandise exports heavily dependent on primary commodities and services exports dominated by tourism and transport. Official development assistance (ODA) had increased to \$35 billion in 2020, but had fallen by 15 per cent in 2021. Although FDI was below the global average, remittances had risen by 43 per cent between 2014 and 2022.

8. Although the world was not on track to meet the targets of the Vienna Programme of Action or the 2030 Agenda, the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, to be held in 2024, offered an opportunity to set a new course for transformative change with an ambitious, action-oriented programme of action. Preparations for the Conference, including three regional preparatory meetings, pre-Conference events for the inter-agency consultative groups for countries in special situations and national focal points, and an ambassador-level retreat, were in full swing, and two preparatory committee meetings were planned for early 2024.

9. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

10. **Mr. Rupende** (Zimbabwe), noting that the reports presented a sobering picture, said that the Committee should build a new plan of action that was ambitious, comprehensive and forward-looking, as announced at the recent annual ministerial meeting of landlocked developing countries. He asked the High Representative to ensure that the whole United Nations system, including country teams, was working coherently to prepare for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, and called for transit countries, development partners and international organizations to continue to provide targeted support in the lead-up to the Conference.

11. **Mr. Ray** (Nepal) thanked the High Representative for accurately describing the priorities and challenges for countries in special situations and for outlining the preparations for the forthcoming Conference. He also thanked the Office of the High Representative for its ongoing support for the Group of Least Developed Countries.

12. **Ms. Fatima** (High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) said that the recent annual ministerial meeting of landlocked developing countries had given the Committee a mandate to design an ambitious, forward-looking programme of action, and that the preparatory process had followed a consultative, whole-of-United Nations approach, including in the regional preparatory meetings. Transit countries and development partners were also fully engaged, and input would be sought from the Group of Friends of Landlocked Developing Countries. The Co-Chairs and Bureau of the preparatory committee had been elected and would soon undertake consultations with all stakeholders.

13. In response to the comment made by the representative of Nepal, she informed the Committee that, as Chair of the Group of Least Developed Countries, Nepal had written to United Nations entities to ask that the Doha Programme of Action be fully integrated into all programmes and activities.

14. **Mr. Téllez Alonso** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, as new development commitments and targets were being adopted for the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, it was important for the international community and the United Nations system to take stock of the implementation of previous targets, in order to assess how effective the policies had been and how unfulfilled the commitments remained.

15. Although they accounted for less than 4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the least developed

countries were the hardest hit by the climate crisis and had registered 69 per cent of global deaths from climate-related disasters in the past 50 years. Some 14 per cent of the world's population, in 46 countries, risked being left behind, while the richest 1 per cent had accumulated more than half of new global wealth in the past decade. The Doha Programme of Action was therefore a step in the right direction, but its timing coincided with the final years of the 2030 Agenda, which required renewed global partnership, solidarity and means of implementation. To support the least developed countries, safe, effective and affordable vaccines, including for COVID-19, must be provided in an adequate and timely manner; the unsustainable debt burden must be tackled, including through urgent action such as debt relief, restructuring and the allocation or reallocation of special drawing rights; and developed countries must meet their commitment to allocate between 0.15 per cent and 0.20 of gross national income (GNI) as ODA.

16. The graduation process for the least developed countries must be re-evaluated to ensure sustainability, as it was unreasonable for countries to stop receiving specific treatment after graduation even though their vulnerability was still evident. That was in line with the need for a measurement of sustainable development beyond GDP. If developed countries fulfilled their commitment to contribute 0.7 per cent of GNI to ODA – still a mere pipe dream – the reality for the least developed countries would be different.

17. For landlocked developing countries, the second half of the Vienna Programme of Action had been marked by the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had stalled or reversed socioeconomic development gains, while challenging global macroeconomic conditions had disrupted the fragile recovery, resulting in greater structural and geographical vulnerabilities. The global supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic had led to shipment delays and steep cost increases for freight. Greater productive capacities, value addition, export diversification and progress up the global value chain were vital to increasing the trade potential of landlocked developing countries, with additional support from multilateral trade and financial systems. In cooperation with transit developing countries, landlocked developing countries needed to adopt further trade facilitation measures to simplify border crossing operations, implement joint border management systems and harmonize customs regulations in order to make cross-border trade faster and cheaper. Automated border processes and emerging technologies would enable seamless, contactless and paperless crossings,

and capacity-building and technology transfer would support integration into global trade through the development of digital infrastructure and policies that supported e-commerce and the digital economy. Structural transformation, including through intensified industrialization and the greater use of science, innovation and technology, were also needed.

18. Synergy and coherence were crucial for in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the Vienna Programme of Action. The Group looked forward to the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries as an opportunity to renew commitments and adopt a new 10-year programme, and supported the implementation of both the Doha Programme of Action and the Vienna Programme of Action within the framework of South-South cooperation and as a complement to cooperation with developed country partners.

19. **Mr. Ray** (Nepal), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that the debilitating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and geopolitical tensions continued to disrupt lives and livelihoods, especially for those in countries in special situations. Economic activities had been further slackened by reduced investment due to high interest rates, low levels of capital expenditure and a decline in aggregate demand, as well as by policies aimed at containing inflation and improving foreign exchange reserves and by rising prices of food, agricultural inputs and energy. If trends continued, an estimated 7 per cent of the global population (approximately 575 million people) would still be in extreme poverty in 2030.

20. More than 251 million people in the least developed countries were food-insecure owing to dependency on food imports, supply chain disruptions, conflict and climate impacts on agricultural production. Over half of the least developed countries were in debt distress or at serious risk of debt default and were heavily reliant on FDI and ODA in their recovery efforts. However, development partners had not fulfilled their ODA commitments and FDI had fallen by 30 per cent from 2022 to 2021.

21. Countries in special situations were highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters and acutely affected by environmental degradation, resulting in growing mortality rates, livelihood disruption and economic loss. More than 8.5 million people in the least developed countries had been displaced or made homeless by climate-related

disasters, and crops had been lost and livestock destroyed.

22. The post-pandemic recovery had not been even, despite the total commitment of countries in special situations. Global support and adequate resource mobilization were urgently needed to address the multifaceted challenges of poverty and vulnerability to external shocks, to build resilience and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Development partners and the United Nations system must therefore assess and reflect on progress in implementing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, fully implement ODA commitments at the earliest opportunity, scale up affordable, long-term financing for development and expand contingency financing.

23. While welcoming the Secretary-General's proposal for a Sustainable Development Goal stimulus package for developing countries of at least \$500 billion per year, the Group called for funds for the most vulnerable countries to be allocated separately. In addition, developed countries should fulfil their commitment to provide \$100 billion per year in climate support for developing countries and immediately operationalize the loss and damage fund. A comprehensive debt relief package for debt-distressed countries was also urgently needed.

24. Lastly, technology transfer was crucial for resilience-building and socioeconomic transformation, and must include the capabilities and knowledge to advance green technologies and adapt them to the specific context of countries in special situations. It was important for the global community to recognize that a blanket approach to development was inadequate.

25. **Ms. Mokhawa** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, said that the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (A/78/283) had revealed a bleak picture of progress towards achieving its targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic had had a severe impact on landlocked developing countries, reversing the limited progress recorded at the midterm review in 2019 as a result of existing vulnerabilities. Geopolitical tensions, stalled global economic growth and rising food and energy prices continued to affect recovery efforts.

26. Trade played a critical role for landlocked developing countries in achieving the Goals, and their limited connectivity to global markets due to missing links in their transport infrastructure kept trade costs high. Reforms to facilitate trade, including in neighbouring transit countries, were therefore urgently

needed. Furthermore, international debt mechanisms needed to be improved in order to address the severe financing deficit of landlocked developing countries, their data and technical capacity constraints and their growing debt vulnerability.

27. While landlocked developing countries were significantly affected by climate-induced hazards and disasters, they had often been left out of relevant discussions and decisions. As many relied heavily on natural resources and agriculture, disasters further hampered their achievement of the Goals. The international community needed to enhance its climate-related support for landlocked developing countries, which looked forward to participating in the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

28. The third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries would be an opportunity to build on previous progress and find long-lasting solutions to achieving sustainable development. The international community must adopt a transformative agenda that reflected the commitment to leave no one behind. Lessons learned from the past growth trajectory could provide key insights on how to lay the foundations for inclusive and sustainable growth for present and future generations, and the outcomes of the three regional review meetings on the Vienna Programme of Action would form the groundwork for a new programme of action.

29. The Group called for the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to be strengthened in the light of its growing mandate and the forthcoming back-to-back conferences for landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The mobilization of voluntary contributions to the trust fund in support of the Office must be expedited to support the preparatory process for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the participation of landlocked developing and transit countries. Support from the Group of Friends of Landlocked Developing Countries was also needed.

30. **Mr. Vongnorkeo** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the international community continued to face frequent, interconnected and multidimensional challenges. Difficult economic conditions had hampered efforts to achieve development goals. The least developed countries and landlocked developing countries were the

most vulnerable, and the divide between them and the rest of the world was poised to widen significantly unless vulnerabilities were addressed comprehensively. Their development must be a top priority, and the international community must support their efforts to meet national and global development objectives.

31. Although significant progress had been made on regional integration and cooperation since the founding of ASEAN, member States recognized the need to bridge the development gap in South-East Asia, a region that comprised emerging economies, landlocked developing countries and the least developed countries. In its Charter, ASEAN had prioritized goals such as alleviating poverty, narrowing the development gap and promoting sustainable development. Several initiatives had been undertaken to highlight the importance of narrowing the gap, as well as the potential benefits of deeper regional integration through the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community to facilitate the seamless movement of goods, services, capital and labour.

32. Guided by the Framework for Equitable Economic Development, ASEAN sectoral bodies sought to reduce trade and investment barriers, raise productivity and upgrade infrastructure, while the ASEAN Free Trade Area reduced tariffs and trade barriers among member States, benefiting landlocked developing countries and the least developed countries by facilitating access to larger markets beyond ASEAN. The sectoral bodies were also working to strengthen the capacity of agriculture, investment, transport and trade facilitation. Under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, efforts were under way to enhance intraregional connectivity through, for example, improved transport links to international ports.

33. ASEAN welcomed the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly as an indispensable tool to provide vital momentum and support to developing countries, in particular those in vulnerable situations. It would be instrumental in recalibrating collective efforts and renewing commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ASEAN also supported the adoption of the Doha Programme of Action, which represented a new generation of commitments between the least developed countries and their development partners, and expected the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries to be crucial for reviewing implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and adopting a new development framework for the forthcoming decade.

34. **Ms. Bartley** (Samoa), speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, said that all groups of countries in special situations faced common challenges such as poverty, environmental vulnerability and limited access to resources, but it was important to recognize that the circumstances of each group were shaped by their specific geographic and economic realities. Small island developing States, for example, grappled with the existential threat of climate change owing to their coastal locations, while the least developed countries faced deep-rooted poverty and developmental challenges and landlocked developing countries experienced geographic isolation and limited access to global markets. Acknowledging the distinct circumstances of each group was vital to finding effective solutions that addressed their specific needs and aspirations for sustainable development.

35. The Group called for the urgent implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and for the Committee to enhance its support for the least developed countries, in particular in priority areas such as infrastructure, capacity-building, technology transfer and access to resources. The international community's commitment to lifting the least developed countries out of poverty, promoting economic growth and including all countries in the pursuit of sustainable development must be revitalized. The Group also supported landlocked developing countries as they set their development agenda for the next decade. Building on lessons learned from the Vienna Programme of Action, the new programme of action should focus more clearly on the trade, transport, infrastructure and integration challenges that landlocked developing countries continued to face.

36. A common hurdle for all countries in special situations, as they pursued different paths to sustainable development, was access to financing for development at the scale required for meaningful change. The global consensus on the need for financial reform, to ensure that the most vulnerable had access to the resources they needed, was a crucial milestone. The Committee must harness the political momentum and advance global policies that yielded tangible results. With countries' destinies inexorably intertwined, even the most daunting challenges were surmountable through collective action to achieve transformative change and ensure that every nation, regardless of its circumstances, had the opportunity to flourish.

37. **Mr. Al-naama** (Qatar) said that while implementation of the Doha Programme of Action had been slowed by the significant challenges facing the least developed countries, it remained an important road map for achieving the ambitions of those countries.

Collective efforts to that end required full implementation by all partners and stakeholders, and the fulfilment of all their obligations.

38. Qatar continued to play a key role in that regard by participating in and hosting several United Nations conferences, including the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, where the voices, needs and aspirations of those countries had been heard. His Government had committed to contributing \$60 million to support the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action. Such commitments reflected Qatar's role as a leading partner in development efforts. Qatar welcomed the positive outcomes and overall success of the Conference, which had highlighted the priority accorded to the issues faced by the least developed countries and had been a major opportunity to draw international attention to the plight of 1.1 billion persons living in the most vulnerable States.

39. No effort should be spared in responding to the needs and challenges of countries in special situations, or in bolstering their development endeavours through multilateral cooperation, collective action and investment in innovative partnerships.

40. **Ms. Babikyan** (Armenia) said that her delegation supported the recommendations included in the Secretary-General's report on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (A/78/283). The report could inform the preparatory process for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries by helping to generate stronger programme documents for the next decade that better reflected the immediate needs of those countries.

41. Armenia attached special importance to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action as a blueprint to promote regional and international connectivity and cooperation in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner. In 2015, her Government had elaborated a national action plan for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which was aimed at integrating the latter's six priority targets into national policies and strategies. A number of actions were undertaken, in close collaboration with regional and international partners, to advance the achievement of those targets, including by reforming customs systems; modernizing and building new infrastructure; mainstreaming energy transitions and decarbonization; improving trade and transport infrastructure; advancing digital technology; and undertaking structural economic reforms.

42. Armenia underscored the importance of regional and subregional cooperation and connectivity in terms

of trade, transport and people-to-people contacts, according to the principles of inclusivity, transparency, equal and non-discriminatory partnership, and respect for international law. In that regard, in preparation for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, Armenia had offered to co-host a thematic meeting, with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in November 2023, under the theme "Enhancing equitable, affordable and inclusive transport connectivity as a driver for more sustainable and resilient economies in landlocked developing countries". The primary aim of the meeting was to enhance regional and subregional cooperation for better connectivity in terms of trade and transport. It would serve as a platform for sharing experiences and innovative approaches to the development of resilient and sustainable economies; identifying policy options for strengthening cooperation on transport connectivity for the next programme of action for landlocked developing countries; and discussing possible deliverables for the upcoming Conference in the areas of transport and information and communications technologies (ICTs).

43. Armenia remained fully committed to effective multilateral cooperation for advancing the agenda of the landlocked developing countries and would continue to support the Office of the High Representative in its mission to assist countries in special situations.

44. *Mr. Cimino (Italy), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

45. **Mr. Cruz** (Angola) said that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was jeopardized by various interlinked crises. To the least developed countries, the Doha Programme of Action represented a renewed and strengthened commitment to work with development partners to mainstream strategies and implement plans and projects for investing in health, education and social protections, for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

46. Unstable oil prices and the lingering impact of currency depreciation had slowed economic recovery in Angola, and macroeconomic and structural challenges continued to hamper the country's economic and social development. GNI per capita had fallen below the threshold for Angola to graduate from least developed country status and it had also shown insufficient improvement with respect to the human development and environmental vulnerability indices. As Angola was consequently ineligible for graduation in 2024, his Government had activated the enhanced monitoring mechanism of the Doha Programme of Action and had

initiated consultations with the Committee for Development Policy on the best way forward. Angola remained committed to sustainably completing its graduation process in due course.

47. Angola was also committed to implementing the Doha Programme of Action, in particular through its national development plan for the period 2023–2027, which prioritized key areas such as human capital development, economic diversification, poverty eradication, climate change and environmental degradation, and the fight against corruption and impunity. The least developed countries should strive to fully implement the Doha Programme of Action in order to address macroeconomic challenges, poverty and social vulnerabilities, and structural inequalities. In so doing, they could get back on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. **Ms. Ahmadova** (Azerbaijan) said that the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries would be a significant milestone for renewing the commitment and partnership required for a better and sustainable future. It would allow for a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which was one of the key documents for accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in landlocked developing countries and ensuring that they were not left further behind.

49. It was essential to engage with all stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, regional and subregional bodies, international financial institutions and the private sector, to address the needs and aspirations of landlocked developing countries. The development of international transport corridors was fundamental for promoting their regional connectivity.

50. Despite being a landlocked country, Azerbaijan stood out for its geostrategic position. It was located at the crossroads of major trade and energy routes, effectively serving as a gateway to energy and transportation corridors. Becoming a regional transport and transit hub was her country's top priority. Its transport policy was aimed at building transport infrastructure to facilitate the interconnection of trans-European and trans-Asian transport networks, in order to offer the shortest and fastest connection between Asia and Europe. With initiatives such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, the Baku International Sea Trade Port and the investor-friendly Alat Free Economic Zone, Azerbaijan was continuing to make practical contributions to the development of the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative and to North-South, South-West and North-West trade routes.

Azerbaijan continued to work with its partners to foster better regional connectivity through improved infrastructure and seamless and digitalized transport corridors, facilitate transit and eliminate regulatory and procedural barriers to transport and trade, in the interest of regional peace, security and prosperity.

51. **Mr. Shamun** (Maldives) said that his country had not yet realized the prosperity that was supposed to accompany its graduation from least developed status in 2011. The problem lay in the graduation process itself, which understated the enduring structural vulnerabilities of small island developing States. Greater support should be provided to the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility, for smoother transitions and the protection of existing development gains.

52. The global community would meet for the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024. Three decades of targeted development plans for those States had failed to deliver lasting solutions. As Co-Chair of the preparatory committee for the upcoming Conference, Maldives was committed to achieving constructive outcomes, with the support of the international community. It welcomed the announcements made by several developing countries and international financial institutions, at the recent Climate Ambition Summit, regarding tangible action to cut emissions and deliver climate justice, and looked forward to increased mobilization of climate finance for adaptation and loss and damage.

53. In addition to the climate crisis, the increase in global food and energy prices had escalated the risk of poverty and hunger in the least developed countries. Given the unique set of challenges faced by the latter, Maldives remained committed to standing in solidarity with them, in their pursuit of sustainable development, and underscored the need for targeted and meaningful assistance to that end.

54. Women and girls in the least developed countries continued to face additional barriers, such as limited access to inclusive and quality education, digital skills, health-care services, social protection and decent work. The international community should redouble its efforts to address those disparities and enhance opportunities for women and girls in those countries.

55. The third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries offered an opportunity to scale up efforts to address the challenges impeding their achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was critical to enhance the physical and digital connectivity of landlocked developing countries, to unlock their full economic potential. Maldives also supported their efforts to

overcome trade-related challenges and pursue sustainable and inclusive growth.

56. The time had come to revise the rules governing development assistance and tailor solutions for small island developing States. Existing financial instruments should be enhanced and new sustainable debt management and debt relief instruments should be designed. Nearly half of the least developed countries and more than a third of small island developing States were either in or at high risk of debt distress. Most countries in special situations were unable to access concessional financing. In the same vein, the international financial architecture should be immediately and credibly reformed, together with the governance of international financial institutions and multilateral development banks, with a view to strengthening the voice and participation of developing countries. Countries in special situations needed the coordinated and targeted support of the United Nations development system, at both the international and country levels.

57. **Ms. Vangansuren** (Mongolia) said that the Secretary-General's report on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (A/78/283) contained valuable recommendations for a new programme of action. By implementing the Vienna Programme of Action, Mongolia had significantly enhanced its connectivity but it still had a long way to go to increase its participation in international trade, fully integrate regional and global value chains, diversify its products and export markets, and reduce its dependence on a limited number of natural resources. The Ulaanbaatar-based International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, which had been successfully operationalized within the last decade, had issued several research papers and study reports on a wide range of issues and had obtained observer status at the General Assembly. Nonetheless, more efforts were needed to transform the Think Tank into a centre of excellence for research and advocacy for enhancing landlocked developing countries' capacity to benefit from international trade, improve human development and reduce poverty.

58. Countries in special situations, and landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in particular, were at a decisive moment for formulating their agendas for the next decade. The third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries was expected to adopt a renewed support framework for addressing the special needs of those countries and strengthening their partnerships with transit countries, development partners and the countries of the South. As Vice-Chair of the Group of

Landlocked Developing Countries and Co-Chair of the intergovernmental preparatory committee for the upcoming Conference, Mongolia was firmly committed to supporting preparations for that Conference and contributing to the collective and coordinated efforts of landlocked developing countries towards advancing their common interests.

59. **Ms. Gahlot** (India) said that the international community was at a critical juncture, where the obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals were increasing and the ability of developing countries, and the least developed countries in particular, to overcome those obstacles was constrained by insufficient means of implementation. India's presidency of the Group of 20 (G20) was aligned with the broad focus of the Doha Programme of Action, and strove to keep the priorities of the global South and the least developed countries at the heart of G20 decision-making processes. Accordingly, G20 recognized the importance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Aid for Trade initiative in enabling that the least developed countries to effectively participate in global trade.

60. At its recently held summit, G20 had reached an agreement on a green development pact for a sustainable future, which sought to address the most urgent needs of the least developed countries and showed the way forward for the decoupling of macroeconomic risks from climate change. In so doing, the pact aimed to promote the implementation of clean, sustainable, affordable and inclusive energy transitions, fulfil climate finance commitments, reduce disaster risk and promote climate-resilient infrastructure. Similarly, the proposed G20 framework for systems of digital public infrastructure would seek to bridge the digital divide between and within countries, to help facilitate faster progress on the Goals. India's plan to build a virtual global digital public infrastructure repository would allow for the voluntary sharing of solutions, among G20 members and beyond. During its G20 presidency India had also proposed a voluntary initiative entitled "One Future Alliance", to build capacity and provide technical assistance and funding for implementing digital public infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries.

61. India was also providing increased support to the least developed countries, within the framework of South-South cooperation. That support consisted in part of concessional loans and grants to the tune of over \$19 billion. In addition, more than 30,000 people from the least developed countries had been trained under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme over the last decade. The India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, which had been launched in 2017, currently had 66 development

projects in 51 countries, 17 of which were in least developed countries. The India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation was actively partnering with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation to provide developing countries, and the least developed countries in particular, with high-impact community projects at the local level.

62. As a transit country, India was sensitive to the challenges faced by landlocked developing countries and prioritized effective cooperation on matters relating to transit and trade facilitation. Through the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, it was cooperating extensively with landlocked developing countries, including those in Africa, where projects in the areas of energy, ICTs, infrastructure and water were helping to improve the quality of life of local communities. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative to strengthen economic cooperation and transport connectivity was geared towards assisting landlocked Bhutan and Nepal, and increasing access to global supply chains for all four countries. Further cooperation under that Initiative was being discussed in the areas of energy, water resource management, inland waterways and rail connectivity. As Co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Landlocked Developing Countries, India looked forward to collaborating on preparations for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, which would present a unique opportunity to devise a road map for the sustainable development of those countries and ensure that they were not left further behind.

63. **Mr. Rupende** (Zimbabwe) said that the Secretary-General's reports clearly indicated that countries in special situations were at serious risk of being left behind, if that was not already the case. Landlocked developing countries, such as Zimbabwe, faced unique challenges that required collective commitment and attention to make sustainable development a reality. While some progress had been made in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, evidence showed that that progress had been insufficient. The Committee should therefore recognize the need to use multidimensional approaches to address the multifaceted issues affecting that group of countries. It should also focus on enhancing partnerships, regional cooperation and international support to build the resilience and capacities of landlocked developing countries.

64. In preparing for the successor to the Vienna Programme of Action, it was imperative to highlight the critical role of international support in advancing the development agendas of landlocked developing

countries. The latter continued to grapple with trade, infrastructure and economic challenges, and it was incumbent upon the international community to renew its commitment to them by providing targeted support and resources under the subsequent programme of action. The Committee's deliberations would be critical for better addressing the needs of landlocked developing countries, and would help to frame both the post-2030 development agenda and the programme of action emanating from the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries. As a member of the preparatory committee for that Conference, Zimbabwe remained committed to working with transit countries and development partners to mobilize the international support and collaboration that were key to unlocking the potential of landlocked developing countries and enabling their full participation in the global economy and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

65. **Mr. Abebe** (Ethiopia) said that progress towards graduation by the least developed countries was slow, support for structural transformation was insufficient and commitments for market integration, debt relief, development finance and climate finance had fallen short. The global economic system remained unfavourable to countries in special situations, and showed little indication of improvement. The international community should unite to overcome the interlinked challenges through renewed cooperation and partnerships. Its focus should be on creating an inclusive financial system, fulfilling climate finance commitments, supporting the Sustainable Development Goal stimulus, encouraging FDI and building resilient infrastructures.

66. Ethiopia had aligned its 10-year national development plan with the Doha Programme of Action and had made notable progress, although there was still much work to be done. Its economy had grown by 8.7 per cent over the preceding decade, and it was promoting regional integration and enhancing private sector participation through infrastructure development and the liberalization of key sectors. To achieve structural transformation, his Government was seeking to build productive capacities and attract FDI, particularly in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The Green Legacy Initiative had been implemented to address the impacts of climate change, support food self-sufficiency and promote reforestation.

67. Despite the challenges it faced as a landlocked developing country, Ethiopia was making strides in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action. It had reduced trade costs through regional agreements, cut operational times and costs, and diversified port access. Infrastructure upgrades, including of the Ethio-Djibouti

Railway, were enhancing trade efficiency, and roads and expressways were improving regional connectivity. With the support of development partners, the Lamu Port and Lamu-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor was boosting trade logistics. To boost exports, his Government had established free trade zones, improved inland containerization and continued to collaborate with regional partners. It had also joined the African Continental Free Trade Area, for greater regional economic integration. While national Governments were primarily responsible for implementing the Vienna Programmes of Action and the 2030 Agenda, reinvigorated global partnerships to that end were extremely vital.

68. **Mr. Armbruster** (United States of America) said that the United States remained committed to countries in special situations. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries had resulted in tangible commitments, which showcased a collective dedication to leaving no one behind. His country had spent approximately one quarter of its bilateral ODA on the least developed countries, for an annual average of \$12.6 billion in 2021 and 2022, and continued to support developing countries that had graduated from that category. The fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries would help to foster additional support for those countries, and advance their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

69. Since 2015, the United States had spent \$5 billion in ODA to further the priorities of small island developing States. His Government had also supported the consideration of vulnerability, including by way of a multidimensional vulnerability index, while recognizing the independence of bodies governing concessional finance. The United States was working directly with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, to help its members to adapt to and manage the impact of climate change, including through the strengthening of early warning systems. It intended to provide technical assistance to help design and bolster the Pacific Resilience Facility, and was aiming to quadruple its climate financing, to help all developing countries reach their climate goals and adapt to climate impacts. Given the key role played by public-private partnerships in growing national economies, his Government was helping to connect businesses from the United States with Pacific island States, to build investment partnerships, foster innovation and technology, clean energy transformation and entrepreneurship, and accelerate progress in critical sectors.

70. The United States was deeply committed to its relationships with landlocked developing countries and, since 2014, had supported the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action by providing over \$50 billion in net ODA to that group of countries. It was working with African partner countries, many of which were landlocked, to unlock innovation and growth in the areas of regional trade and investment. Since infrastructure development was critical for countries in special situations, the United States had championed the launch of the Group of Seven Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. A total of \$600 billion would be mobilized under that initiative by 2027, to help low- and middle-income countries, including those in special situations. One of the flagship projects of the initiative, known as Infrastructure for Resilient Island States, offered expertise, knowledge and capacity-building to small island developing States, as part of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

71. However, the abovementioned assistance would not suffice on its own. A growing coalition of shareholders had been working to bring about changes within multilateral development banks. His Government was working to unlock new lending capacities for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund so that they could provide more financing at better rates for investments in climate, public health and other critical areas. Together with other bilateral and multilateral members of the Addis Tax Initiative, the United States supported efforts by partner countries to improve domestic resource mobilization. As a result of collective efforts, the World Bank would soon enable countries to defer debt payments in the wake of climate shocks and natural disasters, thereby providing much-needed relief to countries in special situations.

72. **Mr. Monyane** (Lesotho) said that the role played by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States was critical for addressing structural constraints and emerging challenges in those vulnerable countries. Support for the Office should be scaled up to ensure its effectiveness in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Doha Programme of Action and the successor programme of action for landlocked developing countries. Lesotho appreciated the bold commitments made by developed partners at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. There was a need for a clear road map of planned activities and time frames for deliverables, for each landlocked developing country, to ensure optimum benefits from those pledges. The six priority areas of the Doha Programme of Action should be implemented in a

timely fashion to help the least developed countries get back on track towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To address emerging challenges, those countries also needed to invest heavily in science, technology and innovation. Greater support should be provided in those areas, especially in the form of technology transfers.

73. Despite their minimal contribution to the climate change crisis, countries in special situations were the most affected by its impact, particularly in terms of agriculture, food security and infrastructure development. Those countries required scaled up climate finance to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. At the same time, declining FDI and ODA remained a challenge for the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, at a time when many of them were in debt distress or at serious risk of debt default. That reality severely hampered recovery efforts and was leading to high inflation and skyrocketing food, energy and agricultural input prices. Disruptions in trade logistics were driving up trade costs, as a result of those countries' high vulnerability and dependence on transit countries to access international markets. Development partners should therefore fulfil their respective ODA commitments to the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, to enable them to overcome the multiple challenges they faced.

74. While there had been some progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action, the second half of its implementation had been marked by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had reversed most of the gains made in priority areas. The new programme of action for landlocked developing countries should reset them on a trajectory towards realizing the Goals. It should be informed by the concrete needs of those countries, the lessons learned and best practices, while incorporating the unfinished priorities of its predecessor.

75. **Mr. Sanusi** (Sierra Leone) said that the outcome of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was a testament to the collective efforts of the international community to leverage a new generation of commitments and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Doha Programme of Action should be implemented by those countries, at the national level, to accelerate policy formulation, guidance and the realization of the Goals. To that end, scaled up and urgent support from private sector investors, ODA providers and international financial institutions, including multilateral development banks, would be critical.

76. There was a growing consensus on the need to reform the international financial architecture and its governance system to better meet the priority needs of developing countries, particularly those in special situations, and ensure their sustainable development. In the same vein, Sierra Leone joined calls for the allocation of special drawing rights to developing countries, and the least developed countries in particular, and for the consideration of debt cancellation for countries in special situations.

77. Given the devastating impact of climate change on the least developed countries, developed States should act decisively to provide adequate access to climate finance and technology transfers in order to facilitate capacity-building, energy transitions, resilience, and climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.

78. **Mr. Alam Molla** (Bangladesh) said that, more than ever before, countries in special situations needed support to mitigate the lasting impacts of crises and build resilience against future shocks. Historically, support measures such as duty-free and quota-free market access had helped his country's private sector to build a solid manufacturing base. The waiver of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights had allowed for the expansion of the pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh, and exemptions under other WTO agreements had boosted national agricultural production, thereby helping to combat hunger and malnutrition.

79. However, the least developed countries needed sustained international support to address the export marginalization that they faced in international trade, which had kept their share of global merchandise exports close to 1 per cent for over 20 years. Like many promises contained in the 2030 Agenda, the promise to double that share of global exports remained unfulfilled. ODA for developing countries was declining, and their access to low-cost, long-term, concessional and emergency funding was shrinking. Multilateral development banks, international financial institutions and public and private lending agencies were not doing enough to address the debt sustainability and debt distress of countries in special situations. Under the current international financial architecture, the least developed countries were frequently forced to pay high borrowing costs to access funds. Unsustainable loans often increased the possibility of debt default, which in turn affected creditworthiness, further limiting access to finance and creating a vicious cycle.

80. Concerted efforts were necessary to address climate vulnerability in the least developed countries,

which were highly climate vulnerable. That group of countries required flexible and predictable climate financing, and tangible and meaningful technology transfers. They also needed access to innovative new technologies, especially green technologies, to help them address the climate crisis and develop their productive sectors.

81. Migrant workers from the least developed countries deserved better treatment and protection of their rights. Over 260 million young people from those countries could benefit from technical education, skills development and training to enter the job market. There was a need for massive investment in human resources, and the online university proposed in the Doha Programme of Action should be commissioned as rapidly as possible.

82. Lastly, the least developed countries that were on a trajectory towards graduation, such as Bangladesh, should continue to enjoy support measures over an extended period of time while they developed their productive capacities. Innovative and transitional financing mechanisms should be tailored to their specific needs.

83. **Mr. Ekren** (Türkiye) said that his country agreed with the proposal of the Secretary-General to significantly strengthen the capacity and functions of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in view of its increased responsibilities related to the preparations for the upcoming third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States. That would also allow the Office to provide substantive and technical support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the respective programmes of action, as well as follow-up at the national level and monitoring.

84. Forty-six least developed countries, 33 of which were in Africa, represented the front line on which the Sustainable Development Goals would be rescued or lost. The digital divide was separating those countries from the rest of the world, and continued to widen. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown how much those countries were lagging behind in science, technology and innovation. The Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, hosted by Türkiye, played a crucial role in bridging that gap. The Technology Makers Lab in the Niger, for which Türkiye was providing support and technological know-how, was one of the Bank's projects aimed at the technological advancement of youth, and could serve as an example

for other least developed countries. He encouraged those countries to make the use of the Bank's services and called for greater support from new and potential development partners to increase the Bank's efficiency.

85. Türkiye also remained committed to supporting landlocked developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustainable development and greater connectivity. The unfinished business of the Vienna Programme of Action needed to be completed through an ambitious programme of action with quantifiable goals, targets, commitments and deliverables to achieve sustainable development objectives over the next 10 years.

86. **Mr. Zulasri Bin Rosdi** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia had launched several programmes to assist other developing nations, in particular least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. Notably, the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme had provided technical assistance and capacity-building in agriculture, trade, health, education, social development and the environment to more than 37,000 participants since its inception in 1980. In addition, a scholarship programme allowed students from those countries to study in Malaysia and gain skills and expertise. Such initiatives could accelerate the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and the Vienna Programme of Action.

87. Cooperative efforts among South-South partners continued to be relevant in the collective pursuit of sustainable development. North-South cooperation, guided by the principles of respect, equality and mutual benefits, should be strengthened through the involvement of Northern countries under the triangular cooperation modality. To that end, Malaysia had been actively implementing that arrangement in collaboration with both bilateral and multilateral agencies through the Third Country Training Programme. In addition, earlier in the year, the Prime Minister of Malaysia had introduced the Malaysia Madani concept, which emphasized the promotion of a humane economy that prioritized the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

88. **Ms. Kardash** (Russian Federation) said that increased indebtedness and a significant decline in investment flows in 2022 had limited the ability of the least developed countries to mobilize domestic resources to achieve structural transformation and provide access to basic social services. Not all of the deliverables of the Doha Programme of Action had been achieved, including the establishment of an online university, the strengthening of early warning systems and the creation of an international investment support

centre and a mechanism for ensuring food supplies. An appropriate strategy was needed to attract funding for the full operation of those structures since there was some concern that, once created, they would not be backed up with the necessary financial resources.

89. Greater international support was needed to ensure stable economic growth in landlocked developing countries, increase their share of global trade, modernize their transport and logistics infrastructure, strengthen their industrial and agricultural production, introduce ICTs and enable landlocked developing countries to shift to new energy sources. The new programme of action needed to include innovative solutions in that regard, including by ramping up cooperation with the private sector.

90. Landlocked developing countries were key beneficiaries of technical assistance projects led by the Russian Federation. Her country was actively involved in regional integration processes, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, which had achieved significant progress in the free movement of goods, services, investment and labour. Joint initiatives were also under way to improve labour productivity and lower transaction costs.

91. The new programme of action should set out strategic guidelines for improving the economic competitiveness of landlocked developing countries and mobilizing additional political support and funding for them, which would clear a path for full consideration of their concerns on the global agenda for sustainable development in the period after 2030.

92. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that, during the period covered by the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action), 12 least developed countries, including Myanmar, had met the requirements for graduating from least developed country status. In his country, the elected civilian Government had integrated the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals into its sustainable development plan for the period 2018–2030 and had undertaken a series of reforms to eliminate long-term economic distortions. As a result, Myanmar had experienced rapid growth, becoming one of the region's fastest-growing economies, with an annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent in 2018–2019. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic had struck, the civilian Government had maintained strong socioeconomic policies. The illegal military coup in February 2021 and the military junta's widespread atrocities had destroyed all of that earlier progress, however.

93. In the two and a half years since the illegal military takeover, people had faced wide-ranging political and socioeconomic challenges, in addition to the military junta's grievous atrocities and systematic gross violations of human rights. As a result, many people had struggled with gaining access to sustainable jobs, basic services and even enough food to meet their primary needs.

94. It was crystal clear that the military junta was not capable of governing the country, managing the economy or delivering durable peace and stability. Under such circumstances, Myanmar was not in a position to meet the Doha Programme of Action targets or achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To do so would require first and foremost ending the military dictatorship, restoring democracy and building a federal democratic union in Myanmar. He called on the United Nations and fellow Member States to provide strong and effective support to the people of Myanmar, in accordance with the principle of leaving no one behind.

95. **Mr. Nunes** (Timor-Leste) said that, as a small island developing State and a least developed country, Timor-Leste was experiencing climatic shocks, a lack of technological capabilities, digital infrastructure inefficiencies, low productive capacity in manufacturing and other sectors, dependency on commodities and natural resources, and a low investment rate. The country had made progress in some areas: life expectancy had risen to 70 years of age from 60 years in 2002; the infant mortality rate had declined; and doctors and health-care staff had been trained through scholarships from development partners and Cuba through South-South cooperation.

96. His country sought to prioritize investment in education, which was a fundamental right and a tool for social and economic transformation. It was also building the capacity of the public health system, ensuring inclusive development and providing a social protection system for its vulnerable citizens. In addition, it was in the process of finalizing its accession to WTO.

97. The primary criterion for measuring national wealth could not be GDP. A country's development should be tailored to long-term progressive transformations, including economic and environmental progress. For that reason, Timor-Leste supported the creation of the multidimensional vulnerability index for small island developing States to address GDP gaps. Transformative financing measures were needed, leveraging the green energy transition and promoting the inclusive participation of all levels of society, with the international community providing ODA, climate

financing and the transfer of technology to assist the least developed countries in their development.

98. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Eritrea) said that his country's development strategy was based on the principles of self-reliance and social justice, assertion of local priorities and ownership of development programmes, thereby avoiding debilitating structural dependency and achieving sustainable and equitable development. Under the strategy, Eritrea had achieved modest growth, although much remained to be done.

99. The solidarity of partners with least developed countries was commendable, and needed, but history showed that it was not wise to rely exclusively on such commitments. The present discussion should therefore focus on how to help the least developed countries help themselves and take the lead in all collective and individual endeavours intended to support them in their development. The role of partners should be considered a complementary one focused on the sharing of knowledge and know-how, technology transfer and the building of human and institutional capacity, disaster risk reduction and mitigation systems and effective response and recovery capacities.

100. In that regard, two issues were not receiving enough attention. The least developed countries urgently needed to enjoy peace and stability, the lack of which posed a serious obstacle to sustainable development. At the same time, there should be an end to the politically motivated unilateral coercive measures imposed by some Powers to advance their foreign policy objectives, which were causing suffering among millions of people in least developed countries.

101. **Mr. Pereira Sosa** (Paraguay) said that landlocked developing countries needed efficient, unobstructed access to and from the sea via all forms of transport on the basis of freedom of transport and other measures, in conformity with applicable norms of international law.

102. In spite of obstacles to progress on the Vienna Programme of Action, Paraguay had continued to improve its economic and development prospects. It had invested significantly in national and regional physical connectivity, improving the density of its paved roads, strengthening the Paraguay-Paraná waterway and constructing the Bioceánico road corridor, which would link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

103. He echoed the proposal of the Secretary-General regarding strengthening the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in view of the increased demand from

the three groups of countries, and improving its strategic position in dealing with key development issues and processes related to sustainable development. He called on the international community to fulfil its existing ODA commitments, increase financing for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, provide technical assistance and develop capacity and pursue new partnerships to drive progress, with a focus on solidarity and cooperation, aimed at creating a world with real development opportunities for all countries, especially those in special situations.

104. **Ms. Chanda** (Zambia) said that geopolitical tensions around the world should not shift attention away from the development challenges of least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. She called upon partners to fulfil the commitments made at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and to support the realization of the key deliverables of the Doha Programme of Action.

105. Zambia remained cognizant of the urgent need for it to graduate from the least developed country category, which would inaugurate a new chapter in its pursuit of sustainable development. In 2021, it had met the eligibility criteria for graduation for the first time. However, recent global economic shocks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, coupled with its own national challenges, had affected its eligibility status. Zambia needed to strengthen its productive capacities and sustain the development gains attained thus far. It was committed to increasing investments in transportation, energy and digital connectivity, and ensuring that socioeconomic development was a catalyst for lasting prosperity and well-being for all its citizens.

106. The development financing landscape must recognize the special circumstances of countries in special situations through scaling up concessional financing; better lending terms, especially for Africa; and better access to climate funds. A spirited effort was needed to support economic transformation and to address the limitations brought on by single-commodity dependency. Significant climate financing was also needed, as no country should be made to choose between protecting the planet and uplifting livelihoods.

107. **Ms. Wang Hongbo** (China) said that landlocked developing countries were grappling with particularly severe challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda, which required strengthened cooperation from the international community and the full mobilization of development finance. While focusing on global humanitarian needs, developed countries should honour

their ODA commitments and increase stable and predictable funding for countries in special situations to support their development efforts and eliminate the root causes of crisis. In addition, the United Nations development system should enhance its funding capacity and ensure the stability of development finance and partnership.

108. China consistently promoted revitalization of the development of countries in special situations. It had implemented the Global Development Initiative: building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for stronger, greener and healthier global development, including many projects that were geared to the specific needs of countries in special situations. China had also organized two capacity-building workshops with the United Nations Development Programme to help developing countries close the digital innovation gap and bridge the development divide. It would continue to exchange experiences and share opportunities for development with developing countries.

109. **Mr. Kerimkulov** (Kazakhstan) said that, in a time of global political and socioeconomic turmoil, it was important to focus on the obstacles faced by landlocked developing countries, including territorial remoteness, isolation from world trade, high transit tariffs and inadequate infrastructure. The Vienna Programme of Action and the Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries were aimed at addressing those impediments. In the light of current challenges, however, new frameworks were needed.

110. The strong political declaration adopted at the recent annual ministerial meeting of landlocked developing countries reinforced shared commitments and laid out actionable steps for a sustainable future, which should be carried through until the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the Summit of the Future.

111. He called for the convening of a ministerial meeting of the landlocked developing countries on trade on the margins of the thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference, to be held in February 2024. Such countries should also be a strong voice at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The agreement on the loss and damage fund at the Conference's previous session must be enforced, with landlocked developing countries receiving a proportionate share. Those countries relied on the

support of transit countries, development partners, donors and specialized international organizations to exchange information, build capacities and provide additional financial resources as well as technical guidance.

112. **Mr. Murphy** (Observer for the Holy See) said that ensuring that the specific development needs and priorities of countries in special situations were properly addressed was a matter of justice and a moral imperative for the international community. Designing effective measures to lift people out of poverty that allowed all women, men and children to develop their full potential must be the ultimate goal of international cooperation and assistance provided to countries in special situations. Any policy or programme truly aimed at supporting those countries must put the human person at its centre and not focus simply on economic or financial challenges. A crucial element of the fight against poverty was investing in young people, especially by ensuring quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, so that they could become a driving force for innovation and sustainable development.

113. Protection of the environment, the sustainable use of natural resources and the fight against climate change were integral parts of the concern for those most in need. Despite bearing the lowest responsibility for the current global climate and environmental crises, countries in special situations were often the ones who paid the highest price.

114. Lastly, it was essential for any development programme adopted by the international community to allow each country in a special situation to grow in its distinct way and develop its capacity for innovation while respecting the values of its culture. International assistance should never be used to impose forms of ideological colonization or to tie economic aid to the acceptance of ideologies. Instead, the ultimate criterion against which all aspects of international development and assistance must be measured was the respect of the inherent dignity of every person and the promotion of the common good of all.

115. **Mr. Biya** (Observer for the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)) said that both the Doha Programme of Action and the Vienna Programme of Action recognized the centrality of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for achieving structural transformation and reversing poverty. While notable progress had been made in that regard in recent years, increased global investment was needed for the 479 million people in the least developed countries who still had no access to electricity and the

215 million people in landlocked developing countries who still lived without reliable energy.

116. As the lead intergovernmental organization for energy transformation, IRENA continued to support those countries, including through the enhancement of renewable energy ambitions in nationally determined contributions and the strengthening of investment frameworks to support the realization of renewable energy projects, such as the Climate Investment Platform and the Energy Transition Accelerator Financing Platform. It also continued to develop the renewable readiness assessment tool, which was aimed at developing the energy sector through the increased deployment of energy and reliable, cost-effective renewable energy solutions.

117. IRENA continued to offer energy market analyses and tailored capacity-building training sessions on long-term energy planning, data and statistics and climate innovation technologies. It was also pursuing projects in various countries on the nexus between energy and other social sectors, such as health care and food security.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.