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Provisional summary record of the 43rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 23 July 2013, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Sajdik (Vice-President) ....(Austria)
later: Mr. Osorio (President) ....(Colombia)

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In the absence of Mr. Osorio (Colombia), Mr. Sajdik (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits (*continued*)

(b) Review and coordination of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (A/68/88-E/2013/81 and Corr.1)

Mr. Acharya (Under Secretary-General and 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 Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020" (A/68/88-E/2013/81) said that most of the least developed countries (LDCs) had been growing more slowly than forecast and were failing to achieve significant reductions in poverty. However, some of those that were performing better were seeing rising investment and robust expansion in sectors other than agriculture. Although the outlook for 2013 was more promising, poor governance, natural disasters and political volatility meant that LDCs remained vulnerable.

Regarding the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, he said that progress was also mixed. The spread of information and communication technologies continued apace, school enrolment rates and women's participation in political life were on the rise, but infrastructure remained far below international standards, access to energy was still limited, food insecurity remained widespread, child and maternal mortality rates were high and national resource mobilization remained inadequate. The LDC share of total world exports, especially trade with emerging countries, had increased but remained heavily centred on primary products and still fell far short of what it could be.

It was worrying that LDCs were bearing the brunt of the overall drop in official development assistance. Moreover, aid continued to be fragmented and unpredictable. Foreign direct investment was unbalanced both geographically and by sector. Remittance flows were also more concentrated in certain geographical areas.

To speed up growth and development in LDCs, productive capacity-building must be placed at the heart of the domestic, regional and global agenda and official development assistance commitments must be met. Duty-free and quota-free market access, simplified rules of origin, reduction of non-tariff barriers and improved allocation of Aid for Trade would be critical to overcoming supply-side constraints to trade. South-South and triangular cooperation could be strengthened and the proceeds of innovative financing methods should be put toward LDC development.

He said that critical LDC issues must be included in the post-2015 development agenda, in particular productive capacity-building, green economy policies, hunger and poverty eradication, resilience-building and participation in international policymaking. Both LDCs and development actors were accountable for the success of development efforts.

General discussion

Mr. Bairagi (Nepal) said that most LDCs would not meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, mainly because of weak capacity, high unemployment, shrinking resources, lack of resilience and the impact of climate change. Graduation would be impossible to achieve without structural transformation and that in turn called for measures to be taken to build productive capacity in LDCs.

LDCs needed a stronger global partnership to be established post-2015 to supply their needs. Countries must furthermore honour their commitment to provide development assistance and ensure that assistance was channelled both to the productive and the social sectors. Donor countries should set up incentive schemes to encourage private businesses to invest in LDCs, and all members of the World Trade Organization should ensure that funds awarded through the Enhanced Integrated Framework were used to increase the trade capacity and international competitiveness of LDCs. He called for the swift completion of the process for establishing a technology bank and science, technology and innovation supporting mechanism for LDCs and for debt relief and restructuring measures to be undertaken to help LDCs.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that agriculture still accounted for the bulk of the gross domestic product (GDP) of LDCs, yet growth of the sector was hampered by factors such as volatile commodity prices and climate change, hence the need to build resilience and improve the management of food stores. Benin had established a national office for food security in the 1990s and was willing to share its experience of doing so with other countries. The international community should redouble its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and fulfil the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and help LDCs to close the technology gap. The plans to establish a technology bank and a science, technology and innovation supporting mechanism for LDCs were therefore welcome.

The Group of Least Developed Countries was deeply concerned about the decline in development assistance and the impact of aid budget cuts on LDCs. Development assistance for LDCs had become more unpredictable, and the Group was greatly concerned about the lack of progress on the Doha Round. He called for the swift adoption of a final document on the promotion of development. Arrangements to offer LDCs duty-free and quota-free market access would go a long way to providing those countries with economic stability.

Ms. Izata (Observer for Angola) said that Angola had one of the fastest growing economies of LDCs, although its performance had been weakening because of the deteriorating global economy. The country was also in the midst of political transformation. Angola had made tremendous progress in areas including education, health, rural development, employment, HIV/AIDS and infrastructure-building. It had relied mainly on its own resources to roll out its national development agenda.

In September 2012 the Government of Angola had announced that it was seeking inclusion on the list of countries eligible for graduation to middle-income country status. It had then established a commission to prepare for graduation and deal with the anticipated consequences. The commission had met with representatives of countries that had gone through the process and meetings had been held with a team from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to design a national graduation strategy. A workshop on capacity-building for sustainable graduation would be organized for government and private sector representatives and the workshop outcome documents would be submitted to the Council by 2015. Countries should lead and own their graduation process, but development partners must also follow through on their aid commitments.

Mr. Song Shangzhe (China) said that not much was being done to shore up fragile LDC economies and that donor countries should do more to honour their commitment to provide official development assistance. They should respect the development needs and priorities of countries and help those countries that had graduated to middle-income status to build on the progress that they had made. In addition, the monitoring and implementation mechanism for the Istanbul Programme of Action should be strengthened and the Office of the High Representative for LDCs should be given adequate resources to fulfil its mandate. China was a long-standing champion of development for LDCs. The Government had organized training programmes to enhance the capacities and technical skills of LDCs and had removed taxes on most imports from LDCs that had diplomatic ties with China.

Mr. Abebe (Ethiopia) said that, with double-digit GDP growth, Ethiopia was one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. The Government was currently implementing a five-year plan to achieve structural transformation through inclusive economic development and to make Ethiopia a middle-income country by 2025. Meeting the targets set out in the Istanbul Plan of Action would require a favourable economic environment and a renewed global partnership.

Ms. Rotheiser-Scott (Austria) said that plans to help LDCs to graduate were welcome but that the necessary conditions for doing so must be established. Graduation from the status of a least developed country should not be seen in terms of relinquishing advantages. The focus of the post-2015 development agenda should be on the plight of LDCs.

Mr. Mitra (Observer for Bangladesh) said that LDCs did not have the technology base or resources to close the technology gap. For that reason, a joint gap and capacity analysis that was to be conducted under the Istanbul Plan of Action had been scheduled for the current year. The proposal by Turkey to host a technology bank was welcome, but United Nations regional science and technology centres should also be established to facilitate the dissemination of appropriate technology in LDCs. With a combined population of nearly 900 million, three quarters of whom lived below the poverty line, LDCs needed international help if they were to graduate from their current status. Although they were not polluters, LDCs suffered most from climate change. Bangladesh hoped to emerge from its current status by 2021 and the international community was invited to provide it with strategic support.

Ms. Ellis (New Zealand) said that her Government supported the efforts of Samoa and Vanuatu to graduate from the list of LDCs. New Zealand had met the target of allocating 0.15 per cent of the national budget to the provision of official development assistance for LDCs.

Ms. Robl (United States of America) said that official development assistance would not be enough to help LDCs, which must mobilize their domestic resources, make use of remittances and seek private investment in order to fuel development. LDCs that were facing conflict and other pressing challenges needed to be stabilized before they could embark on the road to economic growth. Landlocked developing countries faced particular challenges and bilateral and regional agreements were needed to facilitate the transit of goods and stimulate trade for those countries. Assistance for LDCs must come both from the developed world and also from developing countries in the form of South-South cooperation.

Mr. Tesfachew (Director of the Division for Africa, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was predicting a slowdown in the economic growth of LDCs to an average of 6 per cent per annum, one percentage point below the target set in the Istanbul Plan of Action. The slowdown would be caused largely by a fall in commodity prices that would have a significant impact on the export income of LDCs. It would be difficult to meet the objective of doubling the share of world exports emanating from LDCSs by 2020. If petrol exports were excluded, the share of LDCs in global exports was currently a mere 0.53 per cent. LDCs needed to make profound policy changes and develop their manufacturing and services sectors.

UNCTAD was helping the Governments of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Angola to tailor strategies for structural transformation based on their specific needs and situation. It had produced an analysis of the potential of South-South cooperation, which could play a key complementary role to North-South cooperation. Its 2012 report on LDCs was entitled "Harnessing Remittances and Diaspora Knowledge to Build Productive Capacities". Remittances to LDCs in 2011 had totalled more than US$ 40 billion, which was nearly the same amount as official development assistance. UNCTAD was working with the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to identify policy options that would enable the Governments of LDCs to harness remittances for development. Almost 300 million people were expected to join the labour force in LDCs by 2020. Given the low rate of job creation, absorbing such numbers into the workforce would be a daunting task.

Mr. Kwassau (Nigeria) said that his Government was committed to the empowerment of women and to boosting women's full participation in the life of the country. The country's Fund for Economic Empowerment provided credit facilities for rural women and had contributed to the creation of thousands of jobs. The Business Development Fund provided credit for women who had sound business plans but lacked the resources to implement them.

Mr. Acharya (Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) said that, gives the extremely low level of development in LDCs, improvements in conditions had had little impact on poverty there. A combination of economic growth, human capacity-building and sustained development was needed to break the poverty cycle.

A gap and capacity analysis would be used to inform decisions on the future technology bank. Nations needed to take ownership of policy planning but international assistance must also be provided to LDCs.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia), President, resumed the Chair.

United Nations research and training institutes (E/2013/57, E/2013/63, E/2013/L.26 and E/2013/L.30)

Mr. Javan (Director of the United Nations System Staff College), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations System Staff College (E/2013/57), said that 20,000 people had received training from the college in the reporting period. The college generated about three quarters of its funding from course fees and service contracts. It had broadened the range of subjects that it covered, as well as its e-learning portfolio. Its priorities included: leadership training; the provision of learning support to increase the effectiveness of the United Nations system; the alignment of training with the priorities of the United Nations global agenda; knowledge management; and capacity-building training tailored to the needs of field personnel in conflict-affected areas. Around 6,000 United Nations staff members had received security and safety training in the reporting period. The college was consolidating its reputation as a learning and training services provider. Through its continued collaboration with major academic institutions, it had brought academic rigour and innovative approaches to bear in its courses.

Ms. Fegan-Wyles (Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Institute for Training and Research – UNITAR) said that during the 2010–2011 biennium UNITAR had served over 50,000 beneficiaries from 185 Member States; 70 per cent of them from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. UNITAR had developed new courses and training events to respond to changing needs, stepped up training for delegates in New York and Geneva and held briefings on peacekeeping, climate change, sustainable development and other subjects. Its capacity-building activities focused on the green economy, nanotechnology and the use of geospatial imaging. UNITAR had set up two new centres in Algeria and Mexico in 2013 and had established a quality assurance framework to monitor its own performance. E-learning currently accounted for 50 per cent of all the learning activities that it provided.

UNITAR was fully funded through voluntary contributions. Its income had remained stable, with more than 25 per cent of resources being provided by new partners. However, almost all the funding was earmarked and she urged Member States to increase non-earmarked contributions.

Mr. Won-soo (Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Change Implementation) said that the proposed consolidation of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations System Staff College and the United Nations libraries in New York and Geneva was meant to improve coordination between the seven entities and the process for creating, managing and applying knowledge. The aim was to preserve existing mandates while realizing synergies and efficiencies. Each institution would preserve its independence but form partnerships to expand research capacity. An overarching management structure was envisaged for all seven institutions, but existing governing bodies would be retained. The institutions would be grouped into a research hub, training and learning services, and library services. Research findings, lessons learned and best practices and information services would be used to inform decision-making. The General Assembly was expected to take a decision on the proposal by the end of 2013.

Mr. Chebihi (Observer for Algeria) said that his country cooperated with UNITAR through the newly established International Training Centre for Local Actors (CIFAL Maghreb) in Algiers, the arrangements for training Algerian diplomats and senior officials at the Institute of Algerian Diplomacy and International Relations, and the services provided to build the entrepreneurial capacities of young Algerian graduates. UNITAR played a vital role in building developing countries’ capacities and deserved full and unconditional support from Member States. His delegation was following the developments in regard to the proposed consolidation of United Nations research and training institutions with great interest. However, it took the view that efforts to optimize knowledge management must not jeopardize the special mandate of UNITAR.

Mr. Bessler (Observer for Switzerland) said that the report of the Secretary-General on UNITAR (E/2013/63) was testimony to a dynamic, flourishing institution with a promising future. His delegation was nevertheless willing to entertain proposals on enhancing its effectiveness and applauded the idea of creating a United Nations knowledge hub. Various scenarios should be examined to identify which one was fit for purpose. The creation of a new entity would only be useful if it guaranteed better service delivery than the existing structure, and it might be worth exploring whether strengthened coordination between the institutions in question would not yield the same results. When developing reform proposals, the Secretary-General should offer a clear vision of the expected outcome, a realistic assessment of the Organization’s capacity to absorb the changes, and a detailed cost-benefit analysis of each option. Member States must be provided with full and detailed information to allow them to take an informed decision.

Ms. Zolotova (Russian Federation) said that the overall objectives of the proposed reform were certainly reasonable. However, the creation of an administrative superstructure might undermine the effectiveness of existing institutions and the transparency of decision-making processes. UNIDIR, for example, was a highly specialized institution that was funded out of voluntary contributions from interested States. It had created a unique research base that was used to inform multilateral negotiations, among others. Given its particular nature, UNIDIR could not be put on a par with other United Nations research institutes. She requested clarification about the practical implications of merging institutions with distinct management, accountability and funding structures. She said that Member States should be provided with detailed information about the costs, anticipated savings and actual benefits of the proposed reform, which carried both budgetary and political implications and required careful consideration.

Mr. Trambajolo (Observer for Italy) commended the United Nations System Staff College on its work and said that it played a central role in creating system-wide coherence. His delegation supported the work of the Change Management Team, which would help the United Nations to deliver in a context of growing resource constraints. Strengthening links and complementarity between United Nations organizations would improve service delivery and financial sustainability.

Mr. Van Schalkwyk (South Africa) said that if Member States were expected to approve the proposed reform, they must be provided with detailed information and cost-benefit analyses of all options in the shape of a formal report. He agreed that the proposed consolidation carried political implications.

Mr. Matthews (United Kingdom) said that the transparent, results-focused approach of the consultations was commendable. Specific data on the implications of the proposed reform would indeed be useful. Budgeting and assessment of the work done by the different institutions should also be results-based.

Mr. Won-soo (Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Change Implementation) said that the proposal to be submitted to the Council and the General Assembly would include input from Member States. It would contain a cost-benefit analysis and detailed information on reform options. It would also make a case for consolidation, showing that the expected benefits outweighed the costs. The institutions were too small to have their own administrative unit and currently paid for external administrative support. The consolidation process would involve the establishment of a single, small administrative support unit for all seven entities. Costs and savings would be made, service delivery improved and the unique nature of each institution would be respected. The consolidation process must be owned and guided by Member States.

Draft resolution entitled "United Nations Institute for Training and Research" (E/2013/L.30)

Mr. Gallegos (Ecuador), introducing the draft resolution, said that his delegation had held extensive consultations with Member States over the past week and would prepare a revised version of the draft for consideration by the Council at a subsequent meeting.

Draft resolution entitled "United Nations System Staff College in Turin, Italy" (E/2013/L.26)

The President said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

Draft resolution E/2013/L.26 was adopted.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.