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Chair: Ms. Rebedea (Vice-Chair)..... (Romania)

Contents

Agenda item 22: Groups of countries in special situations (*continued*)

- (a) Follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (*continued*)
- (b) Comprehensive 10-year Review Conference on the Implementation of 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 (*continued*)

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In the absence of Mr. Diallo (Senegal), Ms. Rebedea (Romania), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 22: Groups of countries in special situations (*continued*)

(a) Follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (A/68/88-E/2013/81, A/68/88/Corr.1-E/2013/81/Corr.1 and A/68/217) (*continued*)

(b) Comprehensive 10-year Review Conference on the Implementation of 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 (A/68/157) (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Bengaly** (Burkina Faso) said that lack of sea access, distance from international markets and transport costs were impeding the socioeconomic development of the landlocked developing countries. The 2003 Almaty Programme of Action provided a framework for cooperation between landlocked countries and transit countries. However, various factors including rising transport costs, climate change and population growth had limited landlocked developing countries' progress towards participating in international trade.

2. Burkina Faso's national programmes for growth and sustainable development and poverty eradication had integrated the Almaty Programme of Action into their work during the past decade. The Government had worked with partners to improve connectivity and facilitate import and export via Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana and Benin. Burkina Faso had also joined a West African transport facilitation programme, which had had tangible effects on the transport of merchandise in terms of cost and time. While there had been progress, however, the comprehensive implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action would lead to much more significant results.

3. His delegation was encouraged by the recent African meeting to evaluate progress on the Almaty Programme of Action, and by the General Assembly's decision to convene a 10-year review conference. The issue of countries in special situations should be taken into account when drafting the post-2015 development

agenda. His Government was certain that effective implementation of specific measures reflecting the Almaty Programme of Action's five priority areas would contribute significantly to the development of efficient transit transport systems needed so that landlocked developing countries could take part in the international trading system.

4. **Mr. Simati** (Tuvalu) urged the United Nations to pay special attention to least developed countries and small island developing States and, in particular, to reconsider Tuvalu's sovereign trust fund as a means of enhancing the country's financial sustainability given its lack of options for economic diversification.

5. Tuvalu was on track to meet four of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and had the potential to meet three others. However, it was very unlikely to meet the goal regarding poverty, as it was highly dependent on aid and remittances.

6. Tuvalu appreciated the Economic and Social Council's decision to defer consideration of Tuvalu's graduation from the least developed countries category, in light of its extreme natural vulnerability, lack of productive opportunities and failure in relation to the economic vulnerability index. Lastly, according to predictions on rising sea levels, Tuvalu was in danger of being submerged. It was essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as a matter of urgency, to adapt to climate change and to compensate small island developing States which were being dramatically affected.

7. **Mr. da Cruz** (Angola) said that, although the least developed countries had made some progress towards the goals established by the Istanbul Programme of Action, extreme poverty prevailed in the majority. Inequality continued to rise, manufacturing remained insignificant in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), economies were undiversified and therefore vulnerable, and youth unemployment was high. Angola called for full implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, in line with the Secretary-General's report, with the aim of enabling at least half of least developed countries to graduate from that category.

8. Angola's economy had slowed over the past four years due to the global economic crisis, but the country was undergoing swift economic and political transformation. Its economy was expected to grow by 8.2 per cent in the current year due to strong energy,

transport and construction sectors. The Government had accelerated investment for job creation and economic diversification, while also reducing Angola's vulnerability to external shocks. Progress had been made in education and health care. The improvements were a result of the Government's national strategy on poverty and its 5-year national development programme. The latter concentrated on rural areas and aimed to improve basic living conditions and increase the average income, with the aim of speeding up progress on the MDGs.

9. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs had found Angola eligible to graduate from the least developed countries category in 2012. However, foreign direct investment and official development assistance (ODA) remained fundamental, and Angola invited its development partners to enhance their aid to help with economic, social and environmental issues, consistent with the objectives of the Istanbul Programme of Action. It was critical for least developed countries to strongly commit to graduation, and to take ownership of the process.

10. **Mr. Wang** Min (China) said that effective support for the least developed and landlocked developing countries was key to the pursuit of the MDGs and global development and growth. The international community should strengthen implementation of the Istanbul and Almaty Programmes of Action, and respect the leadership of developing countries with regard to their own development. Donor countries should fulfil their ODA commitments and increase the overall support provided to least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, with a targeted focus on their sustainable development. The United Nations development system should incorporate the Istanbul and Almaty Programmes of Action into country and regional programmes, and should also support South-South cooperation by helping developing countries in their efforts to assist least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States should be strengthened to ensure adequate support for countries in special situations. The outcome of the Comprehensive 10-year Review Conference on the Implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action would be important in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda.

As a transit country, China would support the development of the landlocked developing countries.

11. China had committed to granting zero tariff treatment to 97 per cent of taxable items imported from the least developed countries with whom it had diplomatic relations. Its president had announced a series of initiatives to support African development, and the Government had run a number of capacity-building training courses for government officials from developing countries. China had acceded to various international transit conventions and was engaged in regional trade facilitation with landlocked developing countries, in a bid to implement the Almaty Programme of Action.

12. **Mr. Ricciardi** (Paraguay) said that the main strength of the Almaty Programme of Action was its recognition of the link between taking concrete steps in the five priority areas so as to integrate landlocked developing countries into the world economy and achievement of development goals and improvement of the population's well-being. Paraguay had made satisfactory progress towards achieving the MDGs, particularly in terms of universal access to water and health services. Other goals such as increased gender equality in education and reduction of infant mortality still needed more effort.

13. While the bulk of Paraguay's exports were shipped by river or sea, about one third went by land. Paraguay's railroad network was poor, and delays at international borders as well as the customs procedures of transit countries occasioned financial losses. The same difficulties applied to imports. It was essential to develop better infrastructure and to facilitate transnational and transit trade, for Paraguay and for landlocked developing countries in general. Paraguay was currently developing its service sector to promote an inclusive, diversified national economy, but the service sector was particularly affected by transit costs. The Doha Round of negotiations should lead to an agreement on facilitating trade.

14. Paraguay was pleased that it had been recognized as a crucial Atlantic-Pacific link at the twenty-third Latin American Summit of Heads of State and Government, and it encouraged Latin American and Caribbean transit countries to participate actively in the regional review conference on the Almaty Programme of Action that was to take place shortly in Asunción.

15. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Nepal) said that the least developed countries were unlikely to meet the MDGs by 2015 due to their vulnerability. The international community must implement the Istanbul Programme of Action to combat the decline in ODA and foreign direct investment, sluggish service sector growth, energy shortfall and effects of climate change, all of which was hindering the least developed countries' efforts. It was vital that ODA commitments be met and that, as the Istanbul Programme of Action stipulated, aid commitments be reviewed and enhanced in 2015. His delegation called for the establishment of a technology bank dedicated to helping the least developed countries acquire and diffuse new technology to support development. North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation were all important.

16. Nepal's overall development was being stunted by its inability to participate competitively in international trade due, inter alia to its lack of access to the sea and to modern technology. Bilateral, sub-regional and regional cooperation in developing a varied infrastructure and facilitating trade were required if Nepal was to graduate from the least developed country category by 2020.

17. Strengthened international cooperation was essential over the next decade to help landlocked developing countries reduce transaction and transit costs, enhance productive capacity, diversify exports, create environments conducive to achieving sustainable economic growth and build economic resilience. The United Nations should make sure that the needs of least developed and landlocked developing countries were fully incorporated into discussions on finance for sustainable development, the post-2015 development agenda, and other relevant processes.

18. **Mr. Naing** (Myanmar) said that the least developed countries were still struggling to achieve most of the MDGs. The international community needed to provide them with more assistance for structural transformation, as outlined in the Istanbul Programme of Action. Productive capacity-building should be at the heart of least developed countries' efforts to create sustainable development and growth.

19. Although Myanmar was categorized as a least developed country, it had not received substantial support for trade or economic development for the past

20 years. Aid for trade was vital for building infrastructure and productive capacity. The European Union had reinstated Generalised Scheme of Preferences privileges for Myanmar, but it was not yet eligible for duty-free, quota-free market access for all its export items. According to a United Nations report, Myanmar had received the lowest amount of ODA of all the least developed countries in 2012. The European Union and donor countries should provide trade-related, capacity building and development assistance.

20. The Government was implementing an economic and social reform programme designed to enable Myanmar to meet the criteria for graduation from least developed country category by 2020, to move towards a knowledge-based economy and to achieve sustained economic growth of 7.7 per cent in the next five years.

21. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that, given the severe challenges facing them, most of the least developed and landlocked developing countries would not meet the MDGs by 2015. For the past five years Bhutan's economy had grown at an average rate of 8 per cent, unemployment rates were below 3 per cent and it had made substantive progress towards achieving the MDGs, in particular in poverty reduction. However, the economy remained aid-dependent, import-driven and vulnerable.

22. Bhutan had integrated the Istanbul Programme of Action's priorities into its own national development strategies and was fully committed to their implementation. While international recognition of landlocked developing countries' special needs had generated tangible support, those needs must be mainstreamed and incorporated into the post-2015 development agenda, with a focus on structural transformation, economic diversification, enhancement of productive capacity and building of resilience to external shocks. Developed countries should meet their ODA commitments. The funds and programmes of the United Nations must translate political mandates into development activities on the ground. Bhutan supported the Secretary-General's proposal to strengthen its Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

23. **Ms. Chanda** (Zambia) said that implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action should include human and social development, as well as stimulating economic growth. Zambia and its development partners

needed to make concerted efforts to meet the goals outlined in the programme; in particular, high poverty levels, constraints to economic growth and structural impediments should be addressed.

24. Zambia's development agenda emphasized infrastructure and human development as key to sustained economic growth. Her delegation called for governments, non-governmental organizations and other development partners to contribute to the trust fund for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. With strong collaboration, half of the least developed countries should be able to graduate from that category by 2020.

25. Unless the difficulties faced by landlocked developing countries were addressed, the latter would continue to suffer from constrained value addition. Those difficulties included inadequate infrastructure, limited productive capacity and lack of scientific and technological know-how. Zambia urged the international community to implement the specific actions called for in the Almaty Programme of Action and, in addition, to concentrate on transport infrastructure development, sustainable growth, development of information and communications technologies (ICTs), deeper regional integration and capacity enhancement. Finally, she reaffirmed her country's belief that primary responsibility for eradicating poverty and for ensuring the well-being of all lay with the least developed countries themselves.

26. **Mr. Gaumakwe** (Botswana) said that, because of their lack of access to the sea, landlocked developing countries were virtually excluded from international trade. Moreover, although foreign direct investment flows to such countries had increased substantially over the years, in 2012, only 5 per cent of total inflows had actually reached those countries.

27. Development partners should increase their financial and technical support and encourage foreign direct investment. Climate change was increasing landlocked developing countries' vulnerability to natural disasters and the effects of such change had increased their vulnerability to food insecurity and drought. Budgets for vital structural projects such as dams were regularly expanded to include contingency measures to deal with potential environmental changes, making such projects difficult to complete. The international community should therefore help such countries strengthen their agricultural sector through

the transfer of technology in order to improve food security.

28. Botswana continued to harmonize its national policies with the Almaty Programme of Action and it was working with neighbouring countries on initiatives aimed, inter alia, at developing infrastructure and improving access to ICTs. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendations that the international community continue to provide technical, financial and capacity-building assistance for such efforts. Botswana was open to partnerships or cooperative ventures to develop large infrastructure projects such as railway and highway systems and bulk storage facilities.

29. **Mr. Msosa** (Malawi) said that, while appreciating the efforts made by development partners to support the least developed countries, his Government called for further aid to enable them to meet the MDGs by 2015. He hoped that the international community would continue to support them with foreign direct investment, capacity-building assistance, technical support and support for research and development.

30. The Istanbul Programme of Action should be effectively implemented so as to enable half of the least developed countries to graduate from that category. Malawi had integrated the programme's goals into its national growth and development strategy, which focused on six areas: sustainable economic growth, social development, social support and disaster risk management, infrastructure development, improved governance and cross-cutting issues.

31. Malawi wished to add its voice to those of the other landlocked developing countries in emphasizing the importance of integrating those countries' needs into the post-2015 development agenda. Finally, it called for development partners to demonstrate renewed commitment to the development of countries in special situations.

32. **Ms. Nosisi** (South Africa) said that the least developed countries were still characterized by low per capita income, low levels of human development, and economic and structural handicaps that limited resilience to both internal and external shocks. Those problems had been compounded by new challenges such as volatility in global markets, energy and commodity prices, and food insecurity. Least developed countries were furthest off-course with regard to internationally agreed development goals,

including the MDGs. Sub-Saharan Africa was the region with the most least developed countries globally, and thus South Africa prioritized regional development initiatives which addressed the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. South Africa expressed its support for effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action; in particular the development of transport systems which took into account the needs of both landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries, was important.

33. While responsibility for development rested primarily with the governments of the developing countries, the international community and development partners had an obligation to ensure that commitments were met, and that ODA was aligned with the productive capacity-building priorities of the recipient countries. The decline in ODA must be reversed.

34. The least developed countries had done the least to contribute to climate change, yet they were the ones worst affected by it. It was thus only fair that major emitters should contribute towards ensuring that least developed countries were resilient to climate change. The problems facing those countries generally should be at the forefront of discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. South-South cooperation was crucial for least developed countries, but did not in any way replace North-South cooperation. South Africa would continue to work with Brazil and India to address poverty and other challenges such as health, HIV-AIDS, sanitation and access to safe drinking water through the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum.

35. **Ms. Robl** (United States of America) said that, while the least developed countries had collectively seen relatively strong growth over the last decade, progress had varied significantly among countries. Some differences were due to factors such as armed conflict; others were clearly due to actions such as economic diversification, investment in access to quality education and strengthening of public management structures. The United States supported the least developed countries with ODA; it also supported multilateral, regional and private sector efforts to address development challenges.

36. Efforts should focus on establishing efficient transport systems and facilitating trade; that would help to stimulate productive capacity, diversify exports

and strengthen resilience to external and internal shocks. The United States would welcome discussions on developing scientific and technological research in the least developed countries and improving global networking among researchers and research institutions. The international community should increase foreign direct investment in countries in special situations; that, in turn, should create stable, predictable environments conducive to investment. Clear Government commitments to sharing the gains from development across all sectors of society would attract ODA. Countries should strive to include women, youth and disadvantaged groups in their economies in order to see lasting prosperity. Graduation from least developed country status should not abruptly disrupt developing countries' economies, and donors and recipients should plan ahead to mitigate the risk of that happening.

37. **Ms. Jerger** (World Food Programme), speaking also on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, said that while the global community had made great strides towards reducing hunger and meeting the first MDG, 842 million people still did not have enough food to live healthy lives. The proportion of undernourished people in the least developed countries was 29 per cent. Unless human development took into account nutrition and access to food, investments in productive capacity could be undermined.

38. The Rome-based agencies had set up a working group as a follow-up to the Istanbul Programme of Action, focussed on increasing agricultural productivity, food and nutritional security and rural development. In recent years, various initiatives had shown a renewed global commitment to addressing child malnutrition. Programmes comprising social safety nets should include clear nutritional objectives that would result in measurable nutritional improvements. The World Food Programme had led initiatives in a number of least developed countries to grant smallholder farmers access to markets and improve their incomes and access to food. The initial focus of the Agricultural Market Information System, whose secretariat was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization, was on four crops of particular importance to the least developed countries, namely, wheat, rice, maize and soybeans.

39. Natural disasters were a constant threat to food security and livelihoods of smallholders, particularly in the least developed countries where their effects were amplified by weak institutions and poor infrastructure. The World Food Programme, OXFAM America and Swiss Re had piloted a risk management initiative targeted at smallholder farmers to help them improve natural resource management, access micro credit, gain insurance coverage and increase savings. The World Food Programme was one of the largest United Nations agencies working with the least developed countries in terms of resources mobilized; close to 70 per cent of its operational expenses were in least developed countries. It not only addressed the food and nutrition needs of those countries, but also sought to strengthen local markets; in 2012, it had procured 684,000 metric tons of food from least developed countries. Since 2003, the International Fund for Agricultural Development had allocated almost 49 per cent of its total loans and grants to the least developed countries.

40. Increasingly, growing urban populations would depend on proportionately shrinking rural populations for food, and overcrowded slums in cities, as well as isolated rural areas, would pose nutrition problems. Therefore, revitalization and diversification of agricultural production in the least developed countries was vital. The Rome-based agencies believed that the Zero Hunger Challenge could shape the post-2015 development agenda, and spur national and regional action.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.