

**Statement by Pakistan  
On behalf of Asia Pacific Group  
at the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Trade and Development Board**

**Item 9: Contribution of UNCTAD to the implementation of the Programme of Action for  
the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020  
Geneva, 29 September 2020**

Mr. President  
Deputy Secretary-General,  
Director of the Division on Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Asia Pacific Group welcomes the report prepared by UNCTAD in pursuant to paragraphs 153 and 156 of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, also known as the Istanbul Programme of Action. The report provides a description of activities carried out by UNCTAD in April 2019–June 2020, taking into consideration the challenges posed by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

2. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted LDCs. The interplay between the COVID-19 outbreak, the contraction in demand, globally and even more so in some of the major trading markets of LDCs, and the decline of international commodity prices reversed the limited progress that had been made in poverty reduction, among other development indicators. While all countries have been adversely affected by the health and economic crises, the countries affected the most are those most vulnerable to exogenous shocks (whether economic or health-related) and which have the least resilience in terms of resources (economic, financial and/or institutional) to withstand such shocks and/or to rebound after impact.

3. The Istanbul Programme of Action calls on the international community to take action to address socioeconomic development challenges faced by the world's 47 most vulnerable countries. Despite many efforts, LDCs as a group continues to face challenges in meeting the goals and targets of the Programme, and it is unlikely that the final year will bring a significant shift in progress, in particular given the setbacks in development processes brought about by the COVID-19 crisis.

4. The Asia Pacific Group is pleased to note that the UNCTAD has continued its work in support of LDCs across its three pillars. In the area of research and analysis, UNCTAD published many useful reports including 'The Least Developed Countries Report 2019', 'Economic Development in Africa Report 2019', 'Building and Utilizing Productive Capacities in Africa and the Least Developed Countries: A Holistic and Practical Guide', 'World Investment Report 2019' and 'UNCTAD Investment Trends Monitor'. These reports provided timely analysis, guiding the respective country's policies.

5. The Group welcomes UNCTAD's initiative to organize an ambassadorial-level retreat for the LDC Group in February 2020 in Geneva, to assist members of the Group in the ongoing preparation for the Fifth UN Conference on the LDCs.

6. Building productive capacities, which is a crucial condition for economic diversification and sustainable economic growth, is a key objective of the Istanbul Programme of Action. The Group is pleased to note that UNCTAD has organized a regional capacity-building training session for Africa in Namibia in April 2019. The Group encourages UNCTAD to continue its work to assist LDCs by training their government officials to develop productive capacities indices and use them to support evidence-based policymaking. The Group also supports UNCTAD's Entrepreneurship Policy Framework. It may be leveraged for the development of targeted national entrepreneurship strategies.

**Mr. President,**

7. External debt is a major concern of the Istanbul Programme of Action. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, LDCs face significant challenges in fiscal management, including increased risk of debt distress. The Group is pleased to note that UNCTAD Debt Management and Financial Analysis System (DMFAS) programme continued to support 21 LDCs 29 in applying the DMFAS software and in building capacity to effectively manage central government and government guaranteed debt, with the aim of achieving sustainable debt levels.

8. The Group positively notes that during the reporting period, UNCTAD provided technical assistance and capacity building to 19 LDCs with regard to trade facilitation reforms, including implementation of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation.

9. The Group encourages UNCTAD to also continue to promote enhanced awareness among LDCs on ways and means to better utilize the trade preferences available under various duty-free, quota-free market access conditions under the Generalized System of Preferences and other preferential schemes. The group appreciates that UNCTAD has developed a monitoring mechanism to more effectively follow up on the implementation of actions and policy recommendations resulting from rapid eTrade readiness assessments and encourages UNCTAD to continue monitoring and evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the e-commerce and digital economy ecosystems in LDCs.

**Mr. President,**

10. The year 2020 marks the last year of the Istanbul Programme of Action and it has become clear that many of its goals and targets will remain unmet. This threatens to undermine the credibility of the global pledge that no one will be left behind.

11. The significant impact of the pandemic on LDCs has highlighted their structural vulnerabilities and the need to build resilience, based on domestic initiatives and with the concrete and active backing of the international community.

12. Finally, the group urges the international community to strengthen and renew its support to LDCs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and encourages UNCTAD to continue its support to LDCs in preparation for the Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

**I thank you, Mr. President.**