

**Permanent Observer Delegation of the
Organization of Islamic Cooperation to
the United Nations Office in Geneva**

**Statement at the Seventieth Executive Session of the Trade and Development Board
Geneva, 3-5 February 2021**

Mr. President,
Secretary-General, Excellences, Distinguished Participants,

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to UNCTAD Secretariat for the preparation of the *Least Developed Countries Report 2020: Productive Capacities for the New Decade*. I wish also to thank Mr. Akiwumi for his opening remarks and Mr. Delelegn and Mr. Traeger for their elaborate presentations.

Mr. President,

We welcome the focus of the report on productive capacities and structural transformation and commend the high quality of analysis and the relevance of policy options presented.

Currently, 21 OIC countries have LDC status. Like others, the OIC LDCs are facing serious socio-economic consequences caused by the pandemic. The report highlights that the COVID-19 crisis is leading LDCs to the worst economic outcome in 30 years while reversing the economic and social progress for which they have worked so hard in recent years.

According to the figures collected by the OIC Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), the measures taken by the Least Developed Countries to contain the pandemic have further increased the pressure on their limited public financial resources. Consequently, most of their outstanding international debt payments will not be on time. These countries, therefore, need immediate debt relief and restructuring measures to increase their fiscal spaces.

In this regard, the Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC Executive Committee held at the Level of Foreign Ministers on 22 April 2020 made an urgent appeal to the international financial institutions and the bilateral, regional and international partners, especially the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund to consider intensifying their efforts in easing debt burden of LDCs and provide all the possible options including financial assistance, rescheduling of the payments of current debts, concessional loans and basic support accessible to the Member States to combat the COVID-19 consequences.

The Resolution on Economic Assistance to OIC Member States, adopted by the 47th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers held in Niamey in November 2020, commended the initiatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by cancelling debts owed by the Least Developed Countries to the tune of US\$6 billion based on humanitarian considerations and invited well-endowed OIC Member States to develop capacity-building and technical assistance programmes for the benefit of needy OIC Member States, especially Least Developed Countries and facilitate technology transfer to develop and implement national development strategies.

Mr. President,

The OIC and its relevant organs including the Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) provided urgent financial assistance to several OIC LDCs to help them contain the negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic and strengthen their capabilities especially in the health sector.

18 OIC LDCs are currently benefiting from the IsDB Lives and Livelihoods Fund's unique concessional finance model. The value of projects approved has crossed the US\$ 1.5 billion mark in 2020. These funds are used to protect communities from the risk of infectious diseases, improve access to quality healthcare for all, increase access to clean water and empower poor farmers and pastoralists to grow more food by developing the necessary basic infrastructure and integrated pastoralism.

Access to finance remains one of the main obstacles hindering trade in many countries and this problem is particularly acute in the LDCs. This is why the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), member of the IsDB Group, made it priority to support LDCs gain access to finance.

Maintaining connectivity for landlocked countries is particularly critical. It is important to ensure that the flow of essential goods, including medical supplies and agricultural products is not affected.

The OIC Secretary General called on Member States that have advanced experiences in education and artificial intelligence to provide support and transfer successful educational experiences to the LDCs.

In conclusion, we fully concur with the assessment that the LDCs are the battleground on which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be won or lost and wish, therefore, to encourage all relevant stakeholders to recommit to «leave no one behind» and build back better.

I thank you.