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Ministerial declaration of the least developed countries to the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

We, the Ministers of the least developed countries (LDCs),

Having convened on 21 October 2025, during the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XVI) held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 20 to 23 October 2025,

Recalling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sevilla Commitment adopted at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,

Reaffirming the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (2022–2031),

Noting with concern that only eight countries have graduated from the LDC category since its establishment in 1971; acknowledging that, in the 2024 triennial review of the Committee on Development Policy, three LDCs met the graduation criteria for the first time, while noting with concern that none of them fulfilled the income threshold, and that overall progress falls far short of the ambition set out in the Doha Programme of Action to enable 15 additional LDCs to meet the graduation criteria by 2031,

Welcoming the Sevilla Commitment, paragraph 45(e); and emphasizing the critical importance of developing productive and transformative capacities and diversification of exports in our countries to facilitate structural transformation, which must be increasingly sustainable to attain the Sustainable Development Goals and enable smooth, irreversible and sustainable graduation from the LDC category,

Underscoring the importance of reducing vulnerabilities of LDCs to external shocks due to the factors related to trade, finance, climate, natural disasters, conflicts, technology and health, among others, which continue to have disproportionate impact on them,

Highlighting the necessity of addressing challenges such as international trade tensions, just transition to low-carbon economies, the debt crisis, illicit financial flows and tax evasion and avoidance, to mobilize domestic resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, *Being deeply troubled* by the persistence and escalation of the external debt crisis affecting our countries by the decrease in the availability of external finances and sharp rise of debt service costs. Currently, nearly half of our nations are in debt distress or at high risk thereof, significantly impeding our capacity to implement policies conducive to sustainable development, including effectively responding to the climate change,

Recognizing the sluggish recovery of our economies from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic-induced recession and recognizing that our gross domestic product per capita has grown slower than that of other developing economies, exacerbating social and economic disparities,

Underscoring the marginalization of LDCs in technological advancements, including in the digital, blue, green and low-carbon economies,

Recognizing that LDCs contribute the least to climate change but are disproportionately affected by its impacts, including through biodiversity loss, and that they continue to remain among the poorest and most vulnerable countries,

Acknowledging the challenges that graduated LDCs may face after leaving the LDC category and the need for continuous support to ensure a smooth transition,

Acknowledging the valuable contribution of the UNCTAD programme on research and capacity-building on rules of origin, which played a key role in shaping the Bali and Nairobi Decisions on Preferential Rules of Origin, and that of the aid for trade and the Enhanced Integrated Framework in supporting LDC integration into the global trading system through trade-related capacity-building and mainstreaming trade into national development strategies,

Recognizing the importance of women's empowerment in fostering economic growth and sustainable development,

Reaffirming the pivotal role of UNCTAD within the United Nations system in supporting the trade and development priorities of LDCs through its research and analysis, advisory services, consensus-building and technical cooperation,

Stressing the imperative for UNCTAD to continue to strengthen its contribution to the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (2022–2031), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to contribute meaningfully to the discussions on, and shaping of, the development framework beyond 2030,

Stressing that the UN80 Initiative should serve as a strategic enabler for more focused, dedicated and enhanced support to LDCs, aligned with their national priorities and recognizing their inherent need to develop productive capacities, undergo structural transformation and narrow down the gap with other developing countries,

And, while urging trading and development partners to increase grants and concessional finance earmarked for LDCs, including on climate and development finance, science, technology and innovation (STI) development, and to enhance institutional support for accessing and managing these funds, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities:

1. *Call on* UNCTAD to reinforce the work on productive capacities and structural transformation, including the productive capacities index, for the formulation of national productive capacities gap assessments and the related holistic programmes of support.

2. *Call on* UNCTAD to strengthen its work on LDCs, considering the specific needs and circumstances of those in the process of graduation and those expected to remain in the LDC category, through the creation of a dedicated UNCTAD LDCs graduation support programme, with a view to ensuring sustainable graduation and maintaining enhanced development momentum thereafter.

3. *Encourage* UNCTAD to play a leading role in the effective implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, given its long-standing engagement with LDCs since the category's inception and the extensive expertise it has accumulated the last 50 years.

4. *Request* UNCTAD to deepen its LDC-specific research and analysis, particularly through enhancing vulnerability profiles, trade policy analysis and other work targeted to supporting LDCs.

5. *Call on* UNCTAD to monitor and analyse non-reciprocal trade preferences offered to LDCs, including the Generalized System of Preferences, their utilization rates and the extent to which there are supply capacity constraints as well as limiting trade policies, coordination and implementation, regulations and infrastructure or stringent rules of origin; and recommend mechanisms to ensure that graduating LDCs do not face abrupt losses of such preference utilization.

6. *Request* UNCTAD to support the LDC group in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in assessing their special needs, challenges and vulnerabilities, and in enhancing their effective participation in the multilateral trading system, including negotiations to better leverage the flexibilities from multilateral trading rules; and to collaborate closely with the Enhanced Integrated Framework to leverage synergies and scale up support for building trade-related institutional capacities and supply-side competitiveness.

7. *Call on* UNCTAD to conduct data collection and analysis on market access challenges for LDCs, including tariffs that often imply tariff escalation and non-tariff barriers and measures that disproportionately affect LDCs, preventing export expansion and value addition.

8. *Call for* increased support for digital transformation initiatives, providing technical assistance and policy guidance to promote inclusive electronic commerce, digital trade and digital economy in LDCs.

9. *Encourage* the promotion of expanded access to and more effective use of innovative financing mechanisms and financial instruments, including debt swaps, state-contingent clauses and carbon markets, tailored to the specific needs of LDCs, with particular emphasis on support for small and medium-sized enterprises and the private sector.

10. *Call on* UNCTAD to support the scaling up of sustainable finance and long-term institutional investment to advance structural transformation, diversification and resilience in LDCs, in line with the General Assembly resolution on promoting investments for sustainable development.

11. *Urge* the promotion of South–South cooperation and regional integration efforts to foster peer-learning, trade opportunities and joint development initiatives among LDCs, including to achieve or strengthen debt sustainability.

12. *Request* UNCTAD to intensify its work in supporting LDCs in the implementation of trade facilitation reforms in the context of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, among others in strengthening transport policies, including in respect of infrastructure, roads, corridors, port digitalization and energy transition, as well as supply chain sustainability and resilience.

13. *Call on* UNCTAD to support LDCs in enhancing the sustainability and resilience of their transport infrastructure and logistics systems, including shipping, ports and corridors, to help address the impacts of high transportation, transit and logistics costs, promote trade, strengthen value chains and reduce vulnerabilities to disruptions and external shocks, including those related to climate change and disasters.

14. *Request* UNCTAD to strengthen technical assistance and research on sustainable export value chains, in support of LDC efforts to promote low-carbon economic diversification, build climate resilience and increase value addition to exports, and to develop practical measures for their better integration into regional and global value chains, among others, by strengthening service sectors and creative industries.

15. *Support* the creation of a regional centre of excellence on productive capacities development within national institutions to support LDC-specific policies, strategies and data collection.

16. *Call on* UNCTAD to analyse and identify development challenges that require technological solutions, through technology needs assessments and assessments of barriers to the transfer of technology, related skills and know-how to LDCs.

17. *Call on* UNCTAD to support the undertaking of country-specific technology needs assessments, crucial to guide technology transfer efforts and facilitate technology uptake in accordance with article 66.2 of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

18. *Encourage* UNCTAD to conduct research on how to improve the design of the increasingly fragmented, uncoordinated and non-transparent environmental and climate standards and regulations to maximize their environmental and climate impacts while minimizing negative spillover effects on LDCs.

19. *Call on* UNCTAD to provide technical assistance to LDCs in understanding the technicalities and complexities of economic cooperation and free trade agreements, the effective negotiation of concessional treatment and the continuation of trade benefits and preferential market access for a sustained period after graduation.

20. *Call on* UNCTAD to collaborate with relevant international organizations and trading partners to continue the existing international support measures as well as special and differential treatment provisions to LDCs for a period of at least six years after graduation from the LDC category, with a view to avoiding potential relapses and setbacks in their progress.

21. *Request* UNCTAD to continue supporting LDCs in achieving structural transformation and resilience to external shocks, with external and public debt sustainability through the Debt Management and Financial Analysis System (DMFAS) Programme, the preparation of country studies and strategies, including through the UNCTAD sustainable development finance assessment framework and other LDC-specific research, analysis and technical assistance related to debt and development finance.

22. *Call on* UNCTAD to scale research and technical assistance in designing and implementing nationally determined contribution measures related to trade and investment policies that foster just transitions to resilient, low-carbon economies.

23. *Call for* continuing support for developing national systems of innovation to enhance the contribution of STI to national development and the Sustainable Development Goals and capacity-building for policymakers in developing and implementing effective STI policies and policy instruments.

24. *Call on* UNCTAD to extend necessary support to LDCs to draw and retain more foreign direct investment (FDI) and to extract the positive spillovers of FDI on development.

25. *Support* countries in the reform of the existing stock of international investment agreements (IIAs). New-generation IIAs should balance the rights and obligations of States and investors, include provisions for responsible investor conduct and mechanisms for dispute resolution.

26. *Stress* the importance of providing timely and effective financial and technical assistance to LDCs in the process of acceding to WTO.

27. *Call for* the reform of the international financial architecture and the governance structure of the international financial institutions, especially the Bretton Woods institutions, in order to enable the effective participation of all LDCs. We reiterate the call for a comprehensive transformation of the global partnership architecture, with scaled up quantitative and qualitative support on all fronts tailored for the special needs of LDCs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as ensuring that no one or country is left behind.

28. *Call on* UNCTAD to strengthen its capacity to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to contribute meaningfully to the discussions on, and shaping of, the development framework beyond 2030.

We call upon development partners to replenish the UNCTAD LDC trust fund to facilitate the start-up of new and the consolidation of existing activities in accordance with the UNCTAD mandate.

We express our sincere appreciation to the Government and the people of Switzerland for their gracious hosting of UNCTAD XVI.

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to UNCTAD for its continued support and partnership in the development of our countries.