



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

UN-OHRLLS





Statement by

Ms. Rabab Fatima

**Under-Secretary-General and High Representative
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries and Small Island Developing States**

at the General Debate of the

**16th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and
Development.**

22 October 2025

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

I have the honour to speak in my capacity as the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States.

We meet at a moment of profound global uncertainty - marked by rising inequality, deepening geopolitical tensions, economic fragility, widening digital divides, and an escalating climate emergency.

The 92 most vulnerable countries that my Office supports, bear the heaviest burden of these crises.

More than six decades after the first UNCTAD Conference here in Geneva, these countries remain among the most marginalized in the global economy.

- **The 44 LDCs account for barely 1.1% global merchandise exports – which has remained stagnant for a decade.**
- **LLDCs face trade costs up to 63% more than other countries, constrained by infrastructure gaps, and complex transit procedures.**
- **For SIDS, vulnerability is existential. Their narrow economic bases, reliance on tourism and fisheries, and exposure to climate shocks make survival a matter of urgency. On average, they lose over 2 percent of their GDP annually to disasters.**

These sobering facts remind us that without decisive action, structural constraints will continue to trap these countries on the margins of trade, investment, and growth.

Excellencies,

Yet, despite these formidable challenges, there is reason for optimism.

Since the LDC5 Conference in Doha in 2023, two countries have graduated from LDC status, bringing the total number of graduated countries to eight. And fourteen others are now at various stages of graduation.

The SIDS4 Conference in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024 and the LLDC3 Conference in Awaza earlier this year have charted renewed pathways of hope and ambition.

To sustain this momentum, we must turn global commitments into tangible results.

Allow me to highlight four strategic priorities in this regard:

First, we must fully integrate the priorities of these 92 countries into the global development architecture.

The Doha Programme of Action for LDCs, the Awaza Programme of Action for LLDCs, and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for

SIDS must be embedded across every national, regional, and global development frameworks and financing mechanisms.

My Office works closely with the UN system to mainstream these Programmes into country-level work, in partnership with Resident Coordinators and UN agencies.

We are developing implementation toolkits, guidelines, and monitoring frameworks to ensure coherence and accountability across the three Programmes.

Second, we must move decisively from commitment to implementation.

The Programmes of Action include specific deliverables designed to drive transformative change. Progress is underway.

- **For the LDCs, the *Sustainable Graduation Support Facility* - iGRAD –is supporting 14 graduating countries. Work is advancing on the *System of Food Stockholding*, the**

Resilience-Building Mechanism, and an Online University for LLDCs.

- **For LLDCs, the APOA has already inspired new partnerships: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank announced USD 10 billion in additional investments at LLDC3, an important step forward towards the *Infrastructure Investment Finance Facility (IIFF)*, as envisaged in the APOA, to support LLDCs in mobilizing long-term capital for critical connectivity projects.**
- **The UN Secretary General has started the process to constitute a *High-Level Panel on Freedom of Transit for LLDCs*. Furthermore, four countries have offered to host *Regional Agricultural Research Hubs*.**
- **For SIDS, progress is underway on the *Centre of Excellence* mandated by ABAS, which was officially launched during the recent UN General Assembly High-Level Week in New York.**

Together, these deliverables strengthen productive capacities, resilience, and digital inclusion. We are also deepening collaboration with the private sector, international financial institutions, and regional banks to scale up catalytic and blended-finance solutions.

Third, we must mobilize adequate finance and investment to dismantle the deep-rooted structural barriers that constrain growth.

Debt relief and reform of international financial architecture must remain central, as reaffirmed by the Compromiso de Sevilla.

Many of these countries now spend more on servicing debt than on health or education - an untenable reality.

We need large-scale, targeted investments in productive sectors: clean energy, agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, light

manufacturing, digital services, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

To attract private capital on a scale, we must reduce perceived risks through credit-guarantee mechanisms, risk-sharing platforms, regional project aggregation, and improved investment transparency.

Fourth, we must pursue bold structural transformation.

We cannot build a resilient future on commodity dependence or narrow specializations. Economic diversification must anchor national strategies - in high-potential sectors such as digital services, green value chains, ocean economy, sustainable tourism, and regional manufacturing.

Local value addition is key to capturing a greater share of benefits across value chains. Deeper regional and South-South integration can expand markets and foster shared prosperity.

Digital transformation remains a powerful lever for leapfrogging.

Yet, internet access across these 92 countries is far below the global average. We must scale broadband connectivity, smart customs, e-commerce, fintech, and data infrastructure to harness digital trade and innovation.

Equally, we must invest in resilient infrastructure - ports, logistics networks, energy grids, and transport corridors - that serve as lifelines of economic survival and connectivity.

Excellencies,

Let me close with a reminder and a call to action:

Since 2000, global poverty has fallen dramatically - from one in three people to one in ten today. That demonstrates what is possible when the international system works. Yet only 18

percent of SDG targets are currently on track, and progress in the 92 vulnerable countries is seriously off-course.

We cannot allow inequality, debt, and climate vulnerability to reverse decades of development gains.

If we match ambition with action, intent with delivery, and solidarity with systemic reform, we can build a more resilient and inclusive global economy - one in which the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS finally take their rightful place as equal partners in global trade, development, and climate justice.

We value UNCTAD as an indispensable partner in this important journey, and look forward to working with them and other partners as we support the world's most vulnerable.

I thank you.