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Statement by

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and
Small Island Developing States**

at the 80th Session of ESCAP

**Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and
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3:30-5:30pm

**Madame Chair,
Executive Secretary Alisjahbana,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

I congratulate you, Madame Chair, on your election as the chair of this landmark 80th session. I am confident that under your dynamic leadership, this session will have a successful outcome.

I thank ESCAP for holding a dedicated session on the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS on a very pertinent theme: *“Leveraging Digitalization for Productivity and Decent Employment”*.

I also thank ESCAP for the thematic report on this issue which offers concrete recommendations for these countries.

Excellencies,

Digital technologies have revolutionized the modern production frontiers. Yet it presents both challenges and opportunities for the workforce.

Many of the labor-intensive jobs are becoming automated, leading to job losses by low-skilled workers. However, automation has created new opportunities for skilled workforce, fostering a shift of demand in the job market.

For countries in special situation, access to digital technologies, education, and skills development are more critical now than ever before to fully realize these potentials.

Yet, they face serious constraints.

- A staggering 720 million people in LDCs are offline. For LLDCs, the figure is 60% of their population, and for SIDS it is 33%.**
- Internet access is disproportionately more expensive in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. For example, it accounts for 36% of GNI per capita in LDCs, as compared to only 1.4% in developed countries.**
- While, digitally deliverable services exports have nearly quadrupled in the past two decades, LLDCs account for only 0.3% of this trade globally. The Asia-Pacific LDCs accounted for less**

than 1 per cent of the region's exports of digitally deliverable services. The SIDS are also at the periphery of this business.

- LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS are also lagging behind in seizing the tremendous potentials of Artificial Intelligence. Take for instance, the potentials of AI-powered precision farming technologies. UNCTAD estimates that embracing such digital tools can enhance agricultural yields in these countries by up to 70% by 2050.

And the list goes on.

We clearly need a more innovative approach, scale, and speed to make a real difference.

Allow me to share a five specific points in this regard:

First: there must be adequate policy support at global and regional levels to integrate digital technologies and tools for sustained improvements in productivity and the creation of decent job opportunities in these countries.

They need strong support from the development partners, the UN, and other stakeholders, including from the private sector, to facilitate technology transfer, and financing.

South-South and triangular cooperation can also contribute significantly in this regard.

Second: It is critically important to prioritize on education, skills development, and entrepreneurship.

Education systems need to integrate digital literacy and ICT skills from an early age.

Curricula need to be tailored to prepare graduates to meet current and future demands of the job market. There must also be lifelong learning opportunities to continuously adapt to the demands of new and evolving job markets.

Moreover, nurturing a digital entrepreneurship ecosystem is also critical to spur innovation, create high-quality jobs, and attract international investment.

Third: We need to significantly scale up investment in ICT infrastructure.

ESCAP estimates that LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS in the Asia-Pacific region need investments of approximately 8 billion dollars, or 1.2 per cent of their combined GDP, to close the ICT infrastructure gap by 2030.

The affordability of internet is another critical issue. The UN Broadband Commission has set a target for affordable entry-level service at 2% of GNI per capita for these countries.

The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS need strengthened global partnership to achieve these goals.

Fourth: We must ensure that the benefits of the digital era are maximized while addressing its potential risks.

The recently adopted UN General Assembly resolution on the promotion of “safe, secure and trustworthy” artificial intelligence (AI) systems is an important step forward in this direction.

The UN Secretary-General's advisory body on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in its interim report on: *Governing AI for Humanity* have also provided important recommendations in this regard.

Member States are now working together to reach an agreement on a Global Digital Compact by September this year, which aims to define shared principles for an open, free, and secure digital future for all.

These global initiatives are expected to facilitate wider application of modern technologies for the greater benefit of humanity within established global norms and standards.

Finally: We need stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The Doha Programme of Action for LDCs has a dedicated focus area on STI, with specific targets, commitments, and deliverables.

The new POA for SIDS, which has just been agreed by consensus in New York by the preparatory committee for the SIDS4 Conference, identified STI and digitalization as key action areas.

And the draft outcome document for the LLDC3 Conference has also identified STI and structural transformation as key priorities.

A concerted effort is needed by development partners and international organizations, including the private sector, to meet their STI commitments in line with these POAs, especially through enhanced technical and financial support. Implementation of WTO Article 66.2 is critically important in this regard.

Excellencies,

Allow me now to briefly update you on the most recent activities of my Office in support of these three groups of countries.

I am happy to share that the roadmap for the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action - the DPOA - has been finalized. It identifies stakeholder actions, key indicators, and milestones for the next decade, across the 6 priority areas.

We have also made significant progress in taking forward the five key deliverables of the DPOA [namely, a Sustainable Graduation Support Facility (iGRAD); an Online University for LDCs;

International Investment Support Center; Food Stockholding; and Crises Mitigation and Resilience Building for LDCs.]

I thank the Government of Qatar for announcing its support to implement two of these deliverables: namely those on resilience building, and food stockholding. This is indeed a very significant step forward in realizing the DPOA.

We have also taken concrete steps to revitalize the work of the UN Technology Bank for LDCs. It is playing a catalytic role in undertaking technology needs assessment for LDCs, facilitating technology transfer, and strengthening capacities and know-how. I thank the Government of Turkey for its continued support to the Technology Bank.

Excellencies,

For the SIDS and LLDCs, this is a critical year.

We are just about a month away from the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States - SIDS4, to be held in Antigua and Barbuda; and the Third UN Conference on LLDCs.

A key deliverable of the new SIDS POA, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), [which has already been agreed by consensus in New York,] is to establish a *SIDS Center of Excellence* in Antigua and Barbuda which will include, a SIDS Data Hub, a technology and innovation mechanism, and an Island Investment Forum.

The zero draft of the next POA for the LLDC3 also proposes some specific deliverables, namely an Infrastructure Investment Finance Facility (IIFF), Regional Agriculture Research Centers (RARC), and a High-level Panel of the SG on freedom of transit.

These deliverables could be the game changers in accelerating sustainable development in the SIDS and LLDCs.

I count on ESCAP's continued support to ensure the full and effective implementation of the next POAs in the region.

These two conferences are our once-in-a-decade opportunity to bring about transformative changes in the 32 LLDCs and 39 SIDS. I call upon your governments to participate at the highest political level at both these meetings.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As the UN's High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, 92 of the most vulnerable countries in the world, I am committed to keeping the priorities of these countries high on the UN's agenda, especially to enable them to harness the full benefits of the evolving digital technologies for their sustainable development and prosperity.

Let us work together to support them to achieve that, to ensure that no one is left behind.

I thank you for your kind attention.