

Final text



Statement

by

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and
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at the

**Informal Interactive Hearings With Civil Society,
NGOs and the Private Sector
for the
Midterm Comprehensive Global Review of the Implementation
of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries
for the Decade 2001 – 2010**

United Nations, New York

22 June 2006

The President of the General Assembly

The Deputy Secretary-General

The Chairman of the LDC Group

Dear friends from civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector

Distinguished participants

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to join you at these informal interactive hearings with civil society, NGOs and the private sector, as part of the midterm review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for LDCs for the decade 2001 and 2010.

At the outset, let me say that we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the President of the UN General Assembly, Foreign Minister Jan Eliasson. It is because of his guidance, encouragement and full engagement that the hearings are being held and we are here today. We are deeply appreciative for his wholehearted support. I would also like to thank the Members of the Task Force that was set up to organize this event for their hard work in working out the details for all the arrangements for the hearings. We also thank the Office of the Secretary-General, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Government of Norway for their generous support to ensure participation of the NGO representatives from some of the LDCs.

At this point, I would also like to specially welcome the President-elect of the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly from Bahrain. We are very happy that she could join us at this event, particularly because it is under her leadership that the High-Level Meeting for the mid-term review of the Brussels Programme will be held on 18 and 19 September.

As we explore measures and opportunities for speeding up the implementation of the Brussels Programme in the remaining five years, it is crucial that civil society and the private sector, who have shown to be true partners in the development of the LDCs, have the opportunities to make their contribution. As the Brussels Programme itself recognises, civil society and private sector have an important role to play in its implementation. Indeed, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by civil society as a follow up of the Brussels Programme. Just to mention a few, civil society has provided inputs to ECOSOC's annual review of the implementation of the Programme. Civil society has produced assessment reports on the implementation of the Brussels Programme. And before today's hearings, civil society and the private sector were already engaged in the mid-term review process, including at national level in the preparation of national reports on the implementation of the programme. As some of you are aware, LDC Watch, which will be making a statement shortly, also organised a meeting of civil society organisations in Kampala, Uganda, to prepare for this midterm review and more such civil society events are planned, a key one being the Civil Society Forum in Geneva planned on 18 July on the sidelines of the ECOSOC Session. A number of organisations, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, and participants who for one reason or another couldn't make it to the hearings, have also sent their written contribution which have been circulated. The interest you have shown in the

midterm process is indeed encouraging. I am confident that your insights and recommendations, informed by your interaction with the struggling masses in the LDCs at the grassroots level as well as the policy makers at the national and global levels, will greatly benefit the process.

The tasks ahead of us are indeed daunting. While a number of milestones have been reached in the efforts to reduce poverty in the world's 50 most vulnerable countries, the future remains far from bright. Between 2001 and 2005, the LDCs achieved an average annual growth rate of 5.5 percent, highest during last two decades. This is, of course, encouraging news. It should be noted, however, that it falls short of the target of 7 percent annual growth set in the Brussels Programme. Poverty remains on the rise, with 100 million more people forecast to join in the next decade the ranks of the 370 million – nearly half the total population of these countries – already living in abject poverty in the LDCs. Not only will these countries, by the current trends, miss the target of the Millennium Development Goals to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, but the proportion of poor people will, in fact, increase. While other developing countries make progress, the LDCs are sinking deeper into poverty.

Why aren't the LDCs not making as much progress as the other developing countries? It is mainly because of the structural weaknesses – a combination of pervasive poverty and weak institutional, technical and human capacities. Not only do these structural weaknesses increase the vulnerability of LDCs to internal and external shocks, but they also prevent them from taking advantage of economic opportunities such as export trade and attracting foreign direct investment. As a result, LDCs' laudable efforts to improve their domestic environment through economic and political reforms, as well as international initiatives to grant them duty-free and quota-free market access, have not been matched by economic benefits to these countries.

As we embark on the last five years of the Brussels Programme, it is therefore clear that without dramatic action by LDCs and their development partners, the goals and targets of the programme cannot be achieved. If progress has been limited in the last five years, it is not for lack of a framework of action. The seven commitments of the Brussels Programme provide a comprehensive blue-print for joining hands in confronting the key challenges faced by the LDCs. From an analysis of the on-going midterm review process, we have reasons to believe that the specific areas that need added thrust during the second half of the decade are:

- Rural development and agriculture
- Infrastructure, including information and communication technology
- Good governance, including at the local level where the implementation of development programmes takes place
- Empowerment of women
- Energy and,
- Conflict resolution

These are all areas where the private sector and civil society can make a major contribution. Indeed, civil society, NGOs and the private sector are already playing a big role in many of these areas. But greater engagement of civil society and the private sector at all levels is needed to make the required progress. The potential of public-private partnerships needs to be exploited to the full. The unique capacity of civil society to forge grand coalitions that transcend borders, running from the grassroots to the international level needs to be put to the service of the development cause of LDCs. We have seen very successful civil society campaigns for debt cancellation, banning of landmines and for the establishment of the international criminal court; I believe the same level of success can be achieved in focusing world attention on the development needs of LDCs. **Why not start from today a Global Campaign for the 50 most deserving poorest countries of the world?**

I am therefore eager to hear your ideas not only on what more can be done to accelerate the implementation of the Brussels Programme, but also on how to enhance the contribution of civil society and the private sector in pursuing the goals of the Programme. Only maximum contribution from all the development partners – including civil society, NGOs and the private sector – can give us a good chance of meeting the objective of the Brussels Programme to improve the living conditions of the people in the Least Developed Countries. I conclude here and would like to extend a warm welcome to the Deputy Secretary-General amongst us.
