



PRESS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

UN envoy calls for special measures to enable Asian vulnerable countries reach MDGs

ALMATY, KAZHAKISTAN, 21 May 2007: Asia's economic and social transformation of the last 60 years has largely bypassed the region's most vulnerable countries, the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, has said.

Speaking at the ministerial segment of the 63rd Session of the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, Mr. Chowdhury said that while the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States are diverse in their economic and population size, institutional capacities and geography, they all face the challenge of securing the level of socio-economic development required to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Asia Pacific region has 14 Least Developed Countries, 12 Landlocked Developing Countries and 14 Small Island Developing States.

"While there has been good progress on some [MDG] targets, including school enrolment, under-5 mortality and selected health targets, most countries are not on track when it comes to crucial areas of poverty reduction, minimum nutritional needs, literacy and infant mortality," Mr. Chowdhury said of the Least Developed Countries.

He observed that the share of people living below the poverty line in Least Developed Countries of the region is double those of neighbouring developing countries.

"It is not surprising that the region's Least Developed Countries, which account for only 7 % of the total population, have 12 percent of the region's extreme poor. This situation and rising income inequality in many Least Developed Countries of the region are a major concern," he said.

The UN envoy for the most vulnerable countries called for investments in people, production and institutions, including investments in agriculture and empowerment of women, if the Least Developed Countries of the region are to have a chance of meeting the MDGs.

Mr. Chowdhury commended regional programmes such as the Asian Highway and Asian Railway for landlocked countries and the Pacific Connectivity Initiative for small islands as a viable way to overcome the constraints of geographical isolation.

He said that an insurance risk facility, such as the one recently for the Caribbean islands, would help to mitigate environmental risks in the Pacific region.

“If the international community is committed to achieving the MDGs, it cannot afford to ignore the plight of the world’s most vulnerable countries,” he said.

Earlier at the opening of the ministerial meeting, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan said that economic growth does not always solve old problems and quite often, it creates new ones.

“High levels of economic activities in many cases lead to social stratification and widen the income gap between the rich and the poor,” he said, adding that it was in the interests of the countries in the region to fulfill their commitments to achieving the MDGs.

In a message delivered for him by the Under-Secretary-General for Social and Economic Affairs, Jose Antonio Ocampo, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, noted that the Asia Pacific region had achieved a great deal, yet much remained to be completed.

“With Asia-Pacific now home to two thirds of the world’s population, the level of progress achieved in [the] region will be a critical factor in determining whether our global efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals will succeed or fail,” he said.

The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Kim Hak-Su, observed that while hundreds of millions of people had been lifted out of poverty, one out of every three people still lives in extreme poverty in the region.

He said improving health, the theme of this year’s meeting, is crucial for tackling poverty.

For further information, please contact: Fred Kirungi, Advocacy and Outreach Officer, United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. Tel: (917) 367-3431. Email: kirungi@un.org. Website: <http://www.un.org/ohrlls/>