



Statement
by

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and

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States**

on

“The most vulnerable countries of the world”

at the Symposium

**“The Global Development Agenda and United Nations Reform – Towards a
Global Approach to the Millennium Development Goals”**

New York
1 June 2005

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to participate in this Symposium which focuses on two major themes underlying the global development agenda and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: these are “Countries in special situations” and “South-South Cooperation”. We are happy to join with the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa in co-organizing this Symposium, in association with the Foreign Policy Association.

My remarks will focus on the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS). It is widely acknowledged that to achieve the Millennium Development Goals special efforts will have to be made to assure that the Least Developed Countries will make the necessary progress under all the eight targets, in addition to addressing the special needs of these most vulnerable countries as spelled out under Goal 8.

In recognizing these special needs, the international community adopted specific Programmes of Action for each of them, namely the Brussels, the Almaty and the Barbados Programmes,

The challenges and constraints facing these countries are enormous and can only be overcome through the concerted efforts of the international community. Slow economic growth, poor trade performance, continuing environmental degradation, debilitating HIV/AIDS pandemic, discouraging foreign direct investment and unmet ODA commitments, compounded by a host of new challenges in a globalizing world make the development tasks of these countries extremely difficult. As I have said many times, the MDGs will not be achieved globally unless we are able to effectively support these most vulnerable countries in their development efforts.

When the General Assembly established the category of the “Least Developed Countries” in 1971, there were 25 such countries. Today the number of LDCs has doubled. Thirty-four of these are in the African continent. Most others are in the Asia-Pacific region. These countries are the poorest amongst the poor, the weakest segment of the international community. They are too often torn apart by devastating conflicts, civil strife or exposed to natural disasters.

Additionally, the population of the LDCs keeps rising. While globally the average annual rate of population growth has decreased, the LDCs’ growth rate has

remained high. Their present population of nearly 740 million is expected to increase by 200 million more by the year 2015, the MDGs target date. This large additional population increase will present obvious challenges for the 50 LDCs worldwide as these countries are least able to provide for growing population, which in turn threatens sustainable development and results in further deterioration in standards of living and quality of life. The environmental implications of growing population remain far-reaching for those LDCs that are primarily dependent on agricultural commodities, and particularly where water is already scarce and land degradation and deforestation are most severe. The combination of extreme poverty, population pressures and environmental degradation is a powerful destabilizing factor, driving both rural exodus and international migration that is expected to increase in both volume and impact.

Against this somber background, there have been encouraging signs towards achieving the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action. In 2004 some LDCs were able to grow at an annual rate of 5 per cent, benefiting from world economic recovery. They in fact outgrew many other groupings of countries. However, only 11 LDCs have achieved the required 7 per cent GDP growth rate target for poverty reduction. Hence, in line with last year's ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration, the critical need for financial resources for achieving the goals of the Brussels Programme remains.

The development partners of the LDCs, including international and multilateral organizations as well as the private sector and civil society, have shown increasing interest in supporting these countries. I welcome particularly the increase of the total ODA flow to the LDCs that amounted to 23.5 billion US dollars in 2003, a 25% increase, the highest one year increase in real terms after nearly fifteen years of stagnation and decline. In terms of preferential market access, LDCs have been provided almost full access by major trading partners but the benefits of this access to the industrialized markets are yet to contribute in a major way to the development prospects of these countries mainly because of their intractable supply-side constraints.

The UN General Assembly will take stock of the progress made in 2006. My Office, in close consultation with LDCs and our UN partners, is embarking on the preparations for the mid-term review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

Sixteen of the 50 LDCs are also landlocked thus suffering from additional constraints to their development. The geographical difficulties faced by the 31 LLDCs are tremendous. Their situation is further aggravated because of the inadequate infrastructure development and costly and inefficient border crossing and other

procedures in their transit neighbours. Excessive transit transport costs that landlocked developing countries have to bear create more important barrier to foreign markets than tariffs do.

The Almaty Programme for the LLDCs addresses transit, trade and development issues in a holistic manner. The Programme's recognition of the vital link between transport, international trade and economic and social development makes it a milestone initiative. It is a well-focused, comprehensive document, which covers the core areas necessary for the progressive integration of landlocked developing countries into the world economy and international trading system through the establishment of efficient transit systems.

Geographical difficulties represent a particularly great challenge also for the group of small island developing countries (SIDS). There are 37 such islands that are members of the UN, joined by a dozen or so territories, sprinkled all over our planet, ranging from Tuvalu (with the smallest population of 10,000) to Cuba (being the largest with over 11 million). In 1994, the international community gathered in Barbados to agree on a broad-based plan of action to assure the sustainable development of the small island developing states. Remoteness and isolation from the mainstream of the world economy are compounded by their smallness, ecological fragility and environmental degradation, marine pollution, over-dependency on tourism as a major source of national earning. All these contribute to their high degree of vulnerability – economic, environmental and social – and to their slow and complex development process. Beyond these islands' idyllic natural beauty lies a fragility that calls for a special global endeavour.

In January of this year the international community met in Mauritius and undertook the ten-year review of the Barbados Programme for the SIDS. It adopted the Mauritius Strategy to guide the international community in its actions to support the sustainable development of the SIDS in the next ten years.

As the Mauritius International Meeting followed days after the Asian Tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004, this unfortunate natural calamity brought the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of the SIDS into sharper focus. The Strategy addresses the specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities that the SIDS confront.. The Strategy seeks to make the SIDS, its peoples, regional organizations, civil society, private sector and the international community as a whole to become more aware and knowledgeable, acquire and develop capacities and readiness, in order to be able to deal effectively with their vulnerabilities. In other words,

resilience building in the SIDS is the critical element of the Mauritius Strategy.

I remain strongly convinced of the importance of the role that regional organizations can play in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda of the small islands. The Mauritius Strategy notes that South-South cooperation is critical at the bilateral, sub regional and regional levels in strategic areas, such as information and communications technology, trade, investment, capacity-building, disaster management, environment, food, agriculture, oceans, water, energy and education. Regional organizations like the CARICOM, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission have become important regional players and their roles can undoubtedly be enhanced in the context of implementing the international development agenda.

The UN Millennium Declaration of 2000 paid particular attention to the special needs of the least developed, the landlocked and the small islands countries. Goal 8 of the MDGs in focus ing on the need for global partnership for development has identified addressing the special needs of these most vulnerable groups as key targets of achievement. As the UN advocate for these weakest segments of the humanity, I urge again that the international community should come forward in supporting the development efforts of these countries in a meaningful way to make the objective of the global partnership a reality.

Let me conclude by welcoming the proposal for an Asia-Africa Development University Network as outlined by Ambassador Oshima and the Rainforest Initiative as presented by Professor Stiglitz. These are good ideas and deserve our full support.
