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Outcome of the Asia-Pacific regional review meeting

Note by the Secretariat

The text of the political declaration of the Asia-Pacific regional review meeting held in preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries is set out in the annex to the present note.*

* The annex is being issued without formal editing.



Annex

Outcome of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review Meeting in preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Political Declaration adopted on 2 September 2021

Introduction

1. We, Ministers and representatives of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries least developed countries including Yemen, participating in the Asia-Pacific Regional Review Meeting in preparation for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, are gathered in Geneva from 30 August to 2 September 2021 in a hybrid format (both in person and online) to undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action) by the least developed countries and their development partners, share best practices and lessons learned and identify obstacles and constraints encountered, as well as actions and initiatives needed to overcome them; to identify effective international and domestic policies in the light of the outcome of the appraisal, as well as new and emerging challenges and opportunities and the means to address them; to reaffirm the global commitment to addressing the special needs of the least developed countries made at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; and to mobilize additional international support measures and actions, in addition to domestic resources, in favour of the least developed countries and, in this regard, to formulate and adopt a renewed partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners, including governments, the private sector and civil society at all levels.

2. We are having this meeting at an unprecedented time. The world is truly in a challenging situation. Massive and rapid spikes in new cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have further worsened the already shattered health and economic systems. Hospitals are more overwhelmed than before. Many of our countries are experiencing a third or fourth wave of COVID-19, mostly affected by the deadly Delta variant. Our countries are particularly hard hit owing to the combination of weak health infrastructure, low levels of resilience to external shocks, and limited fiscal space and resilience capacity to address the impacts of various shocks and crises. The significant slowdown in growth that our economies are experiencing is reversing years of progress in poverty reduction and other socioeconomic indicators. Widespread extreme poverty, the lack of social protection systems and potential food shortages will have profound impacts on our development prospects. We acknowledge that the compounded impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on systems already stressed by the climate and financial crises demonstrates the complex and systemic nature of disaster risk and that hazards can combine to have cascading impacts. A renewed global action plan is warranted for least developed countries to protect their economies and people from the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. We note with great concern that least developed countries suffer disproportionately high human and economic losses owing to climate change and disasters. We welcome the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group I report entitled *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*, which

flagged that carbon dioxide concentration was at its highest point in at least 2 million years. The report found that human activity, primarily the production of atmospheric carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, has driven global warming at a rate that is unprecedented in the past 2,000 years. Owing to climate change, human communities everywhere on Earth are affected by extreme weather events that are longer, more intense and more frequent. The Earth has already warmed by approximately 1.1°C, or approximately 2°F, and every fraction of a degree of further warming would bring ever more destructive floods, deadlier heat waves and worsening droughts, as well as accelerating sea level rise that could threaten the existence of some island nations. If current warming continues, the Earth will exceed 2.7°F (1.5°C) of warming and reach 3.6°F (2°C) by 2050, which will further intensify the severity of extreme weather. The report warned that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach. While least developed countries have contributed the least to climate change, they are the most vulnerable to and the worst affected by its consequences. We are running out of time, and there is an increasing moral and economic imperative to respond to the consequences of climate change. Developed and larger polluting countries should immediately reduce their planet-warming pollution, compensate the loss and damage faced by the least developed countries and provide them with adequate funding and technology on a sustained and predictable basis to overcome the challenges posed by climate change and build resilience against future shocks and crises.

4. The Asia-Pacific least developed countries and Yemen are more vulnerable than other countries to the effects of climate change for several reasons. First, many of them, such as small island States and low-lying coastal States, are the most exposed to the consequences of global warming, such as a rise in sea level. Second, this vulnerability has been intensified by the high proportion of their economies that is accounted for by agriculture. Third, the melting of the glaciers in the Himalayas threatens the very source of major rivers upon which millions of livelihoods depend, including the looming threat of glacier lake outburst floods, and also creates far-reaching negative consequences in both upstream and downstream countries. Fourth, the increased frequency of natural disasters has further aggravated these countries' vulnerability and reduced their ability to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters. The island least developed countries are even more prone to the existential threat of climate change, with some already experiencing internally displaced climate change refugees. Their small, open and narrow economies, which rely heavily on the trade of a few primary commodities and services, make them highly susceptible to external shocks and commodity price volatility. The international community should urgently support their adaptation and mitigation programmes.

5. The Asia-Pacific least developed countries including Yemen are facing multiple challenges, as out of the 12 least developed countries in the region, four are landlocked and five are small island developing States. Moreover, three least developed countries in the region are trapped in conflict and post-conflict situations, causing humanitarian crises and severely impeding progress towards the goals and targets of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Steady economic growth helped to reduce income poverty in these countries and facilitate their progress towards meeting several targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, however, the least developed countries encountered significant challenges and continued to face vulnerabilities. The severe impacts of climate change and increased frequency of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries, together with their inability to address the impacts, has increased their vulnerability, undermining their economic development. These challenges, if not addressed, will have an enduring impact on the resilience of the countries, even if they manage to graduate from the category of least developed countries.

6. We note with satisfaction that the issue of graduation bears special significance to the Asia-Pacific least developed countries. Ten out of twelve least developed countries in the region (including Yemen) are at varying stages of graduation, which testifies to the commendable progress that the countries of this region have achieved. We are, however, mindful that the progress achieved so far is far from adequate, as many of our countries are struggling to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As we take stock of the implementation of the Istanbul Program of Action and prepare for a new 10-year programme of action, our ultimate objective is the attainment of graduation by all least developed countries in the region by 2030.

Status of implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action

7. We note with satisfaction that, during the implementation period of the Istanbul Programme of Action, the Asia-Pacific least developed countries made considerable progress in their socioeconomic development. Their aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) growth was 6.4 per cent during the period 2011–2019, while the simple average growth was less than 5 per cent. It is likely that economic growth in the final year of the implementation period of the Istanbul Programme of Action will be lower in most countries, with an estimated weighted average of 2.5 per cent in 2020 because of severe COVID-19-related disruptions.¹ Government revenue (excluding grants) increased from 19.1 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 22.8 per cent in 2019, driven primarily by the rise in tax revenues.

8. We note, however, that most of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries achieved only small changes in the composition of their GDP by major sectors, reflecting only limited progress in productive capacity and structural transformation. Limited structural transformation makes the countries less resilient to economic shocks. The share of manufacturing value added in GDP has either fallen or remained almost unchanged. Low private investment, infrastructure gaps, lack of skilled labour, poor capacity of public sector institutions and difficulty in diversifying export markets are some of the impediments to manufacturing growth and productive capacity development. Further efforts will therefore be required to expand and diversify the manufacturing base, seek out new markets, adopt new and innovative forms of manufacturing technologies, invest in new skills and improve investment climates to increase productive capacity.

9. We note that, overall, the provision of physical infrastructure has improved across most Asia-Pacific least developed countries. However, the general poor quality of road, port and digital infrastructure contributes to high transportation costs. Although mobile cellular subscriptions in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries surged remarkably, from 38.1 per 100 people in 2010 to 89.5 in 2018, Internet penetration was only 47 per cent in 2019, while the Istanbul Programme of Action target was to provide 100 per cent access to the Internet by 2020. Access to electricity in Asia-Pacific least developed countries rose sharply, from 55.4 per cent in 2010 to 87.3 per cent in 2018.

10. We are concerned that the Asia-Pacific least developed countries as a group missed the Istanbul Programme of Action target to double the share of exports, as their combined share in world goods and services exports increased from 0.23 per cent in 2011 to only 0.38 per cent in 2019. While Asia-Pacific least developed countries are important beneficiaries of the preferential schemes that many of their trading partners offer, many of them have not been able to take full advantage of these measures, owing to often complex non-tariff barriers and supply-side constraints.

¹ *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021* (United Nations publication, 2021).

11. We note that modest progress has been made by Asia-Pacific least developed countries in achieving human and social development. Poor health services are making Asia-Pacific least developed countries more vulnerable to pandemics, such as COVID-19. It has also proved existing health-care and social protection systems in most of the region's least developed countries to be inadequate. Indeed, only 19 per cent of the population in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries was covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2019, compared with 58 per cent for other developing countries in the region. As a result, this has left many workers, in particular those in the informal sector, vulnerable to external shocks. On average, least developed countries in the region invest only 0.9 per cent of GDP in social protection, compared with 6.3 per cent for other developing countries.

12. We also note that despite progress in education, the average net enrolment rate for primary education has remained at approximately 90 per cent over the implementation period of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Moreover, enrolment and completion rates for tertiary education remain low, with far-reaching implications for the structural transformation agenda of the least developed countries. Lack of access to quality education, which is compounded by lack of access to basic services, continues to particularly affect young people living in remote areas, as well as those living in displaced or poor communities where there is a lack of human resources and of technical and digital tools to secure quality education and relevant skills development. Lack of economic opportunities, poor basic facilities and infrastructure, such as the lack of computers and access to safe drinking water or electricity, insufficient trained teachers and the limited or lack of adequate learning and teaching materials seriously affect the quality of education in least developed countries.

13. We recognize that the Asia-Pacific least developed countries represent an enormous human and natural resource potential, which provides opportunities for them to participate in world economic growth, welfare, prosperity and food and energy security, and that they have made considerable efforts in implementing the commitments of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Therefore, a successful, renewed and strengthened global partnership that effectively addresses the special needs of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries will contribute to peace, prosperity and sustainable development for all. Further strengthening our collective actions towards enabling least developed countries' young populations and women will more effectively contribute to equitable and inclusive development, poverty eradication, job creation and social justice. Going forward, we recognize that youth from Asian least developed countries constitute an essential partner and resource for the achievement of the goals of the new programme of action. We recommend the meaningful inclusion of youth voices at all levels of the preparatory process aimed at the inclusion of the challenges impacting young people, as well as their innovative solutions, for a strengthened intergenerational partnership.

14. While least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region are still primarily "young", they are moving towards ageing societies as a result of rapid fertility declines and increased life expectancy. There are more older women than older men. This further calls for strengthening social protection, including access to health care and providing health care that caters specifically to the needs of older persons, including long-term care.

15. While net official development assistance (ODA) to Asia-Pacific least developed countries increased in nominal terms between 2011 and 2018, the ratio of ODA to gross national income in fact declined from 4.3 per cent to 2.7 per cent during the same period. In the light of rising spending needs and economic contraction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public debt in most Asia-Pacific least developed countries is estimated to have increased in 2020 by 5.9 percentage points of GDP, and a higher debt service burden is anticipated in the future. These developments are

worrying, as they point to a reduced fiscal space facing these countries, in times when pressures on their development are increasing.

16. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Asia-Pacific least developed countries have increased from approximately \$5.7 billion in 2011 to \$8.4 billion in 2018. Personal remittances sent to the Asia-Pacific least developed countries have steadily grown, from \$17.5 billion in 2011 to \$31.9 billion in 2018. The average cost of sending those remittances, however, remains high, ranging in 2017 from 4.4 per cent to 16.6 per cent of the amount transferred, which is much higher than the Addis Ababa Action Agenda target of reducing such transaction costs to 3 per cent by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have adverse implications for remittances to least developed countries, although several countries saw a considerable uptick in remittance inflows during the second half of 2020.

17. Of the current 12 Asia-Pacific least developed countries (including Yemen), 9 met the criteria for graduation for at least the second consecutive time at the most recent triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy in 2021, and one met the graduation criteria for the first time, effectively placing 10 Asia-Pacific least developed countries at some point along the graduation pathway. Three countries from this region (Maldives, Samoa and Vanuatu) graduated in the past decade. Hence, at the end of the current decade, most of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries are likely to have graduated. This would be a remarkable sign of progress and an achievement in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

18. The most severe recent challenge encountered by the least developed countries is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has dimmed prospects for graduation and smooth transition, as well as for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Although initially viewed as a public health disaster, COVID-19 rapidly turned into an unprecedented economic and social crisis. The Asia-Pacific least developed countries have experienced considerable reductions in economic growth, widespread unemployment, sharp contractions in international trade, a slowdown in the flow of external resources and an almost complete halt in the travel and tourism sectors. The impact of the crisis has been particularly harsh on those employed in the informal sector, including women and migrants, as they had no access to social protection. Despite the relatively small number of COVID-19 cases reported in the least developed countries in the initial phase, the pandemic continues to ravage these countries with its new and deadly variants, and has developed into a multidimensional crisis owing in part to these countries' high levels of external dependency and exposure, as well as their low levels of resilience, defined as the capacity to prepare for, absorb and recover from economic and non-economic shocks.

19. The GDP growth rate of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries has sharply declined, reaching 2.1 per cent at a weighted average rate (with a simple average of 2.5 per cent) in 2020. Education systems have also been severely disrupted by the pandemic. A lack of technological capability and digital connectivity and an inability of many households to access information and communications technology (ICT) have constrained the feasibility of remote learning in least developed countries, as has the absence of educators trained in handling and operating digital technologies. Consequently, many children and young people, in particular girls from poor households, have dropped out of schools, which adversely impacts school enrolment, literacy rates and future job prospects. In least developed countries in particular, missing school meals will have a serious impact on child nutrition and lead to increased stunting.

20. All of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries witnessed sharp drops in tourist arrivals when travel bans were imposed, leading to a 47 per cent decline in earnings from tourist arrivals in 2020 compared with 2019, with cascading impacts on tourism-related enterprises and services. Exports from least developed countries dropped by 17.5 per cent during the second and third quarters of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.

21. We are concerned that the impact of COVID-19 has further jeopardized the limited progress towards achieving the goals of the Istanbul Programme of Action as outlined in the 2021 report of the Secretary General on the implementation thereof and the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021. COVID-19 has made the vulnerabilities of Asia-Pacific least developed countries, including their structural challenges, more pronounced, and it is expected that they will be further impacted in the long term owing to the fragility of their health-care systems, limited coverage of their social protection systems, limited financial and other resources and high levels of debt, illicit financial flows and vulnerability to external shocks. Besides slower growth, the pandemic is expected to reverse gains achieved in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries and Yemen in recent years, in particular in the areas of gender equality, poverty eradication and reductions in income inequality, education and employment, thereby jeopardizing the progress in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The risk of another lost decade of development and a failure to achieve the Goals is high and rising. Therefore, building back better, stronger and more resilient is an imperative for least developed countries.

22. The pandemic has also demonstrated that least developed countries have limited buffers and capacities to respond effectively to external shocks. These factors have been compounded by bleak external conditions surrounding ODA, international trade, FDI and remittances in the aftermath of the pandemic, forcing the least developed countries to reassess their development strategies, including preparations for graduation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

23. We therefore underline the need to revisit the current system of support for the least developed countries in the lead-up to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in Doha from 23 to 27 January 2022, with a view to ensuring that the international support measures provide the levels of assistance necessary for the Asia-Pacific least developed countries to meet their financing needs for Sustainable Development Goals, address the structural barriers to development that they face and overcome their vulnerabilities. It is thus crucial that a new programme of action not only support the required acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but also strengthen the systems and policy frameworks in these countries to more effectively integrate and fairly compete in the global economy and to eventually converge with other developed countries.

Call for action

24. We underline the urgency of an ambitious and transformative development finance and policy response package for least developed countries – both domestic and external – to enable sustainable recovery from the pandemic and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We call upon our development partners to provide enhanced support to least developed countries to achieve the overarching goal, set out in the Istanbul Programme of Action, of enabling half of them to meet the criteria for graduation by removing structural constraints through the eradication of poverty and the achievement of accelerated, sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and sustainable development. Especially with the setbacks in development progress due to COVID-19, this requires effective and sound national government policies and commitments, enhanced global support and

appropriate mechanisms at all levels. We also call for genuine solidarity with the aspirations expressed by least developed countries during this meeting, with a view to fostering and strengthening new partnerships for achieving Sustainable Development Goals in these countries.

25. We recognize that the principle of country ownership and leadership remains crucial in order to accelerate progress towards sustainable development, and we recommit to taking the lead in formulating, implementing, following up and reviewing our own coherent economic and development policies, strategies and plans. We call upon the international community to fulfil its commitment to give special attention to the least developed countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the next programme of action for least developed countries for the decade 2022–2031, which will be adopted at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

26. We recall the “Statement dated 28 April 2020 of the Group of Least Developed Countries on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19): burgeoning challenges and a global stimulus package for the least developed countries” ([A/74/843](#), enclosure I). We reiterate our call for a global stimulus package for the least developed countries to be funded and implemented with immediate effect to address the impacts of COVID-19 which includes, among other things, an emergency public health package, including personal protective equipment, ventilators, telehealth and telemedicine facilities; support for social protection systems; development and dissemination of robust information, education and communication campaigns to demystify myths and fears surrounding COVID-19 vaccines; education support for students in the form of digital equipment, as well as educational radio and television programmes; fulfilment of ODA commitments of 0.15–0.20 per cent at the earliest with grants-based ODA; full debt cancellation of all multilateral, bilateral and commercial debts owed by least developed countries and a debt standstill with immediate effect until the decision of debt cancellation; possibility of richer countries apportioning some of their SDRs to multilateral institutions to pay for debt payment cancellation for least developed countries; lifting of trade barriers and scaling up Aid for Trade; and additional allocations, including increased special drawing right allocations for least developed countries to the tune of \$50 billion.

27. Furthermore, in the medium to long term, the stimulus package includes ensuring an adequate, affordable and rapid supply of vaccines/immunization and antiviral drugs related to COVID-19; providing technology, technical know-how and free licence to manufacture antiviral drugs and vaccines; launching stimulus packages to stabilize the agricultural sector with seed distribution and fertilizer programmes and subsidies; taking into account structural constraints and longer-term investment requirements for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the debt sustainability framework for least developed countries; launching a renewed and revitalized equitable global trade framework to promote export earnings of least developed countries; promoting the use of digital transfers of remittances and reduce remittance transaction fees; enhancing the quality, availability and affordability of the Internet and other online-related facilities, especially in rural areas; and providing countries graduating from the category of least developed country with continued and scaled up international assistance to support export sectors in order to avoid the reversal of development gains.

28. We underline that robust and comprehensive social protection systems can support people in times of unanticipated shocks, stabilize aggregate demand and prevent an economy from falling into a deep recession. They can also protect the poorest and most vulnerable people, especially those employed in the informal sector, from the vagaries of economic cycles and help to prevent them falling into poverty. Most least developed countries lack such systems. In the medium to long term, least

developed countries need to prioritize strengthening their social protection systems and explore options to consolidate their financial viability. Strengthening productive capacity and promoting economic diversification will also play an important role in addressing multidimensional poverty.

29. We will introduce innovative social protection schemes, especially to provide social protection floors, and ensure that for those in the most vulnerable situations, such as persons employed in the informal sector, young men and women, indigenous, ethnic and religious minorities, young persons living with disabilities, the unemployed, persons not in employment, education or training and those coming from economically deprived households, are adequately covered.

30. We commit to establishing and strengthening social protection mechanisms, including through mobilizing domestic resources, and with full and predictable support from our development partners, to protect the poor and vulnerable populations, including the provision of direct support in the form of cash or food to at least 350 million people living in extreme poverty in least developed countries. In this regard, we call upon the development partners to provide a \$5 billion allocation in emergency assistance as fresh funds for cash transfer to the people living in extreme poverty in least developed countries.

31. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our health-care systems by significantly increasing the annual budget for the health sector, and we urge development partners to scale up support in this sector and improve the quality of health care, including access for all population age groups. Specifically, we call upon the development partners to support access to equipment, such as personal protective equipment, sanitization and other protective measures for front-line workers, sufficient numbers of ventilators, and other supplementary equipment, as well as an uninterrupted supply of essential medicines and equitable and affordable access to vaccines and medication.

32. We recognize the importance of building productive capacity as a critical enabler for the development and graduation of the least developed countries and reducing the dependence on exports of few and primarily raw commodities. We emphasize that the development of physical infrastructure is an important prerequisite to reach the Istanbul Programme of Action target and target 8.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals of 7 per cent economic growth and sustainable development, and that significant amounts of investment and technology are essential, including through public-private partnerships, innovative financing, regional integration and appropriate institutions and regulation, to bridge the existing savings-investment gap in the least developed countries. In this regard, we will strengthen the underlying investment climate, with enhanced support provided by the development partners and international financial institutions, including by improving predictability, governance and transparency, including in procurement practices and policies. We will substantially increase economic and export diversification with a view to reaching the level of other developing countries in export concentration by 2030.

33. We recognize that least developed countries face key challenges with respect to their economic structure. We will therefore further strengthen our efforts to accelerate capital accumulation, knowledge development, technology acquisition and employment creation, including for low-skilled labour, especially women, for the expansion of higher value addition and competitiveness, including in high-productivity services, such as ICT, tourism and financial services.

34. We recognize the need to provide the growing youth population in least developed countries with education, training, job opportunities and prospects for a decent life. Addressing the increased challenges from the COVID-19 crisis for young women and men in least developed countries will require expanding existing cash

transfer schemes, in-kind support and other transfers to vulnerable households and workers, including in the informal economy; developing comprehensive national plans for a job-rich recovery, with close coordination across government agencies, reliable labour market information to facilitate monitoring of progress, and social dialogue to ensure accountability; reshaping skills development systems and addressing key skills gaps resulting from changes in demand and the digital revolution; and capacity development for youth to develop and implement sustainable business.

35. We recognize that older persons have experienced income losses from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them are dependent on family transfers or work in the informal sector, which makes their incomes highly vulnerable. Because of their limited access to ICT, older persons often have limited access to telemedicine and require special efforts to be connected.

36. We commit to developing and implementing modern, smart and dynamic education policies and programmes, with full engagement of the youth population in decision-making processes, with a view to providing skills development, diversified capacity-building, and dynamic and lifelong learning programmes to increase young people's employability and preparedness for the labour market, both domestic and international. In this regard, we call upon the international community to invest heavily in alternative and innovative educational programmes in least developed countries that provide learning solutions and tools to ensure that the young people can acquire the necessary skills and competencies to tap the full potential offered by modern technologies and the fourth industrial revolution.

37. We call upon the development partners to support the least developed countries to access digital equipment, including low-cost laptops or other devices, as well as educational radio and television programmes and the distribution of equipment, such as radios and textbooks, to the poorest and marginalized households, especially for girls. We further commit to supporting large-scale national efforts to utilize technology in support of remote learning and online education.

38. We also invite our development partners, including Governments, the private sector and academia, to enhance interaction, collaboration and exchange programmes for students, as well as share scientific studies and research papers between academic institutions of least developed countries and the rest of the world. We also invite them to significantly increase the number of scholarships to least developed countries and invite higher education institutes to allocate places and scholarships for students and trainees from least developed countries, in particular in the fields of science, technology, engineering, medicines and business administration in developed countries and other developing countries.

39. We call for a global agreement and consensus on the establishment of an online university for least developed countries with high academic excellence, international standards and global recognition of its certification, primarily dedicated to teaching graduate and postgraduate studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics for citizens of least developed countries and graduated countries. In this regard, we invite the development partners to host this university and provide predictable financing to fully cover tuition fees and other expenses of the students related to their digital access and reading materials, ensuring a 50:50 gender balance, and we request the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly for consideration at its seventy-seventh session, in full consultation with least developed countries and their development partners, as well as relevant United Nations entities, in outlining the modalities, terms of reference and sustainable funding sources.

40. We recognize that technology plays a crucial role in the promotion of inclusive development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The critical

importance of technology for development has been made even clearer by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further amplified the need to address and close the digital and technological divide. We call upon the international community to come up with specific measures that support the transfer of technology to enable least developed countries to reap the benefits of frontier technologies for achieving Goals, including through access to and adapting modern technologies, technological know-how, infrastructure and necessary logistics. We call upon the development partners to consider the provision of concessional start-up finance for least developed countries' businesses that invest in new technologies.

41. We welcome the new targets adopted by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development in 2018, in support of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, within the context of the new challenges of a digital world. These included that, by 2025, broadband Internet user penetration should reach 35 per cent in least developed countries; all countries should have a funded national broadband plan or strategy, or include broadband in their universal access and services definition; entry-level broadband services should be made affordable in developing countries, at less than 2 per cent of monthly gross national income per capita; 60 per cent of youth and adults should have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in sustainable digital skills; and 40 per cent of the world's population should be using digital financial services. We call upon the development partners, the private sector, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders to contribute to the achievement of these targets, as well as to those of the Secretary-General's road map for digital cooperation, especially since digital technology, including remote learning, has become a necessity in all socioeconomic sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2025, broadband Internet user penetration should reach 35 per cent in least developed countries. By 2031, it should double to reach the 70 per cent mark.

42. We call upon the international community to provide enhanced financial and technical support to least developed countries to establish and strengthen national and regional science institutes to promote research and development in science, technology and innovation, as well as adaptation and application of modern technologies for domestic uses. We will also promote local innovation capabilities of least developed countries for inclusive and sustainable economic development by bringing together local scientific, vocational and engineering knowledge. We will address gender disparities by enhancing the participation of women and girls in science, technology and innovation activities.

43. We note that, while access to electricity in the Asia-Pacific least developed countries increased significantly, wide disparities persist across countries. We express our concern that, without urgent and enhanced action, least developed countries will not be able to reach the international target on energy. Closing the energy gap will require increased investment in off-grid, mini-grid, decentralized grid connected solutions to reach remote populations, fostering investments for renewables and clean cooking fuels, climate-proofing existing hydroelectric generation systems and rehabilitation of degraded watershed areas, improving technology transfer, using new business models, such as pay-as-you-go, and enhancing regional integration. We call upon development partners to enhance financial and technical cooperation and assistance for the generation and distribution of sustainable energy, as well as to enhance energy efficiency. We welcome the launch of the Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access at the 2019 Climate Action Summit, led by Morocco and Ethiopia, aimed at responding to the vital needs of the global population, in particular in remote areas of the least developed countries, in terms of electricity access, clean cooking, clean water supply, irrigation, cooling and heating, with the ambition of "leaving no one behind". We call upon development partners to provide necessary support to this coalition and request the Secretary-General to undertake necessary measures for the

implementation of the Coalition and the Least Developed Countries Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative for Sustainable Development.

44. We call for doubling international public finance to meet the urgent need for investments in power generation, along with grid reinforcement and upgrading of technology, in order to provide modern, reliable and sustainable energy to all through improved generation, transmission and distribution facilities and enhanced energy efficiency in least developed countries. We also call for scaled-up and targeted support to least developed countries in the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, including the global plan of action for the Decade. We urge our development partners to provide financial and technical support to least developed countries on a priority basis to double their generation of electricity per capita by 2030 and double the share of renewable energy in their total final energy consumption by 2030.

45. We reaffirm our commitment to addressing climate change in accordance with our capabilities and national circumstances. We recall the Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience, which steps up the climate ambition of least developed countries with its vision to deliver climate-resilient development pathways by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050, which complements the least developed country work programme under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in providing strategic direction for supporting the least developed countries in addressing climate change. We call for multi-stakeholder partnerships that will bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and communities focusing on integrated adaptation, mitigation and resilience planning at the national and local levels. We recognize the importance of youth-led initiatives to counterbalance the existing negative effects of climate change and the necessity to support such initiatives while establishing strong institutions and clear regulatory frameworks for environmental accountability.

46. We reiterate the critical role of the national adaptation plans under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement in addressing adaptation needs in the least developed countries and underscore the importance of supporting all least developed countries in producing their first national action plans by the end of 2021; implementing their priority adaptation needs in the national action plans under the Green Climate Fund, as well as other sources; and developing indicators for measuring progress on adaptation on the ground in least developed countries. The least developed countries face great capacity constraints in accessing these funds. We call upon the developed countries to operationalize the Green Climate Fund fully and in a timely manner, with the goal of mobilizing \$100 billion per year by 2020, promoting and facilitating low-carbon and resilience-building projects in the least developed countries and addressing the needs of people adversely impacted by climate change and extreme weather events. We welcome the decisions of the Board of the Green Climate Fund to aim for a 50:50 balance between mitigation and adaptation over time on a grant equivalent basis and a floor of 50 per cent of the adaptation allocation for particularly vulnerable countries, including least developed countries. In the same vein, we call for providing 50 per cent of the total climate finance provided by all developed countries and multilateral development banks to adaptation and resilience and 50 per cent of these funds for particularly vulnerable countries, including least developed countries.

47. We recognize the urgency of implementing the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, and that prevention, disaster risk reduction and resilience-building are central to a country's sustainable development strategies and investment to reduce poverty and inequalities and protect the human, economic and natural capital. We acknowledge that financing for disaster risk reduction presents a considerable challenge to the implementation of national and

local disaster risk reduction strategies in the least developed countries, and call for all public and private domestic and international investment, as well as bilateral and multilateral support, to be risk-informed and aligned with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies. We further acknowledge that available climate finance under the Green Climate Fund (and other funds) remains a major challenge for many least developed countries to access efficiently and effectively, owing to many capacity issues and the complexity of access modalities, and we call for simplified access procedures and enhanced efforts to ensure that least developed countries are able to develop bankable projects that lead to measurable resilience on the ground.

48. In order to build back better and enhance preparedness for future disasters, we reaffirm our invitation to the General Assembly to decide on the establishment of a comprehensive multi-stakeholder resilience-building mechanism for least developed countries, leveraging the existing measures and initiatives. In this regard, we request the Secretary-General and the Assembly to undertake necessary measures to improve resilience-building for least developed countries, which would help them to build and strengthen their national adaptation and mitigation capacity; provide technical support to prepare project documents to access and utilize available climate funds and critical technologies; provide risk insurance and guarantees for weather insurance and derivatives; and draw together bilateral initiatives and support by multilateral institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and foundations, building on existing regional and international initiatives. We encourage investments and partnerships to strengthen the understanding of climate risk and, more broadly, systemic risk, and its application in decision-making in the least developed countries, including through disaster risk reduction education, comprehensive risk management, building academic and scientific capacity, utilization of frontier technologies, and supporting traditional, indigenous and local knowledge and practices.

49. We underline the need for building and strengthening a multi-hazard early warning system and a comprehensive multi-hazard crisis mitigation and resilience-building mechanism for each least developed country as key instruments to build resilience against and mitigate the impacts of various shocks. We invite the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive study involving all relevant United Nations development system and other entities on the existing arrangements, lessons learned and gaps identified, and make recommendations on the modalities, terms of reference, institutional mechanisms and funding modalities of a multi-hazard early warning system and a comprehensive multi-hazard crisis mitigation and resilience-building mechanism for least developed countries at the national and regional levels and to submit it to the General Assembly for consideration at its seventy-seventh session.

50. We underline that, given the impact of the food crisis on food security in many least developed countries, there is a need for the international community to increase funding for short-term food emergencies. We call for accelerated and aligned actions, including adequate investment in physical infrastructure, scientific and technological development, research and agricultural extension services in the least developed countries and incorporation of producers from least developed countries in regional and global value chains, supported by all stakeholders and countries, including more integrated support from the United Nations and the international community to free our world from poverty, inequalities, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. We underline the need for allocating at least 10 per cent of public expenditure to agriculture and to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness.

51. We call upon the international community to establish a system of stockholding for least developed countries on a regional and subregional basis in dealing with humanitarian food emergencies or as a means to limit price volatility. In this regard, we invite the Secretary-General to explore the feasibility, effectiveness and

administrative modalities of such stockholding and report to the General Assembly for consideration at its seventy-seventh session.

52. We stress the urgency of facilitating access to credit, technology and skills to support agricultural development and building up inclusive value chains that support smallholder farmers and private sector development to create synergies between nutrition, poverty reduction and the structural transformation of the economies of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries.

53. We are concerned that the least developed countries are disproportionately affected by the collapse of value chains and declining commodity prices due to COVID-19, after their share in world merchandise exports deteriorated in five successive years. As the Asia-Pacific least developed countries have highly concentrated exports with a heavy reliance on few products, we will target the diversification of our economies as a key part of our development strategies, including through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this context, there is also a need to step up investments in green recovery to enhance growth, create decent jobs and accelerate intraregional trade through the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

54. We reaffirm our determination to complete the Doha Development Agenda and call upon the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to strongly commit to addressing the marginalization of least developed countries in international trade and to improve their effective and equitable participation in the multilateral trading system. We also call upon the members to fully and faithfully implement all the provisions specific to the least developed countries as contained in the WTO agreements, ministerial decisions and declarations, including the least developed country decisions taken at the WTO Ministerial Conferences held in Bali and Nairobi, as well as decisions adopted in the regular work of WTO. We further call upon the Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference to deliver concrete outcomes in favour of the least developed countries. We invite the WTO secretariat to undertake a comprehensive study on the lack of progress in achieving target 17.11 of the Sustainable Development Goals and to make specific recommendations on the way forward to achieve this target by 2030.

55. We welcome the entry into force of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, which will address high trade costs incurred by least developed countries and facilitate the integration of these countries into regional and global value chains. We call upon the development and trading partners to provide targeted assistance and support to least developed countries to help them to build sustainable capacity to implement their commitments under the Agreement, in accordance with articles 13 and 21 thereof.

56. We also call upon developed country members to provide preferential market access and rules of origin to all business-to-consumer goods and services that are exported from least developed countries, with special preference to those using an e-commerce platform exporting directly from suppliers in least developed countries. In this regard, we look forward to intensified and concerted action by the Group of 20 countries to enhance the ability of least developed countries to more fully engage in e-commerce, and further call upon relevant organizations to enhance support, including capacity-building to assist least developed countries to address gaps in legal and regulatory frameworks and develop digital skills and platforms.

57. We need robust international support – both financial and technical – to promote e-commerce in our countries by building a digital ecosystem and providing capacity-building support. We urge the development partners to provide additional and substantial support to least developed countries to build required infrastructure in energy, electricity and Internet penetration; data protection; upgrade workforce skills, ensure affordable and reliable access to broadband and mobile networks and Wi-Fi

connectivity; facilitate mobile banking with low or no digital payment fees; build the ability of least developed country suppliers to participate fairly in, and establish their own, e-commerce platforms to directly trade their goods and services ; and strengthen productive capacity and structural transformation, along with transparent and fair regulations for promoting e-commerce and the integration of least developed countries into the global economy.

58. We call upon the international community to increase the proportion of Aid for Trade going to least developed countries, provided according to development cooperation effectiveness principles, with a view to doubling it by 2031 from the 2018 level. We urge our development partners to increase Aid for Trade support for least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Least Developed Countries. We also call for increased support from multilateral development banks and the private sector to meet trade financing needs, in particular those of small businesses. We urge private and public sector actors to work together to address trade finance gaps by enabling a rapid transition to paperless trade and addressing regulatory constraints that hinder trade finance.

59. We recognize that domestic resource mobilization is key for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but was seriously impacted by COVID-19. We commit to enhancing efforts towards taxation, savings mobilization and financial inclusion with the aim of reducing inequalities. We stress the importance of conducive international regulatory frameworks and transparency, as well as national and regional financial institutions, including development banks, in this respect. We call for enhanced international tax cooperation to avoid base erosion and profit-shifting, and we welcome support through initiatives, including Tax Inspectors Without Borders.

60. We are concerned about the decline in bilateral ODA to least developed countries during 2020, when it is most needed. We reiterate our call upon donor countries to fulfil their ODA commitments in the Istanbul Programme of Action and strive to provide 0.25 per cent of their gross national income by 2030 or at least 50 per cent of net ODA to the least developed countries. We also call upon them to ensure the quality and effectiveness of aid, especially through predictability and accountability, the use of recipient countries' systems and the elimination of tied aid. We call upon the development partners to meet the target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of gross national income for ODA to least developed countries in the short term and to set a target to provide at least 0.35 per cent of gross national income for ODA to least developed countries or provide at least 50 per cent of net ODA to least developed countries by 2025.

61. We welcome the approval of the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of a general allocation of special drawing rights equivalent to \$650 billion. We invite IMF to allocate at least \$50 billion in special drawing rights to least developed countries through voluntary channelling of special drawing rights from wealthier countries to provide enhanced liquidity and to further support health needs, including vaccinations, as well as to help to enable greener, more robust recoveries from the pandemic.

62. We recognize that, while ODA must remain central and play a catalytic role, there is a need to tap additional resources, including through innovative financing mechanisms based on new partnerships between countries at different levels of development, as well as public and private actors, in line with the characteristics of each country and sector. We stress that the innovative sources of financing, including blended finance, should be additional, substantial and predictable, with preferential rates especially tailored to least developed countries, and disbursed in a manner that respects the priorities and special needs of the least developed countries and does not

unduly burden them. Furthermore, we call for new financial instruments that harness the potential of digital innovations for the financing of the Sustainable Development Goals, including, for example, digital financing platforms, innovative digital services, the digitalization of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and domestic resource mobilization. We also call for a dedicated financing mechanism that delivers catalytic investment capital for small and medium-sized enterprises and small investment projects in Asia-Pacific least developed countries to mobilize sustainable private investments that advance the Goals and act as a crisis facility to mitigate the effects of COVID-19.

63. We are concerned about the illicit financial flows from various least developed countries, and we commit to enhancing efforts to curtail illicit financial flows at all levels, enhancing disclosure practices and promoting transparency in financial information. We also commit to promoting policies and programmes, including the involvement of civil society organizations, to track and bring back any illicit capital outflows. This needs to be complemented by measures to prevent the transfer abroad of stolen assets and assistance in their recovery and return.

64. We commit to redoubling our efforts to substantially reduce illicit financial flows by 2030, with a view to eventually eliminating them, including by combating tax evasion and corruption through strengthened national regulation and increased international cooperation, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the strengthening of international cooperation to combat illicit financial flows. We call upon the international community to strengthen its efforts for the recovery and return of stolen assets to their countries of origin and the identification of good practices for the return of stolen assets in support of sustainable development.

65. We are concerned that, since 2012, but exacerbated by COVID-19, the external debt stock and debt service of many Asia-Pacific least developed countries have drastically increased. We acknowledge the efforts of the global community to deal with the financial impacts of the pandemic, including the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, which is open to least developed countries, but we recognize their limitations in terms of scope and participation of creditors, as they do not cancel any debt. We call upon development partners to take effective measures to reduce unsustainable debt levels owed by least developed countries, including through debt cancellation and restructuring of existing high debt. We call for improved debt management and responsible lending and borrowing, including by providing financing on more concessional terms by official creditors and ensuring that lending practices are fully in line with sustainable financing practices. We call on bilateral and multilateral development partners to use new instruments, such as debt swaps and State-contingent lending, taking into account risks beyond the control of governments, such as natural disasters and climate risks. We also call for technical assistance and capacity-building for least developed countries to strengthen their debt management.

66. We call upon development partners, multilateral development banks and IMF to introduce new and comprehensive debt relief initiatives for least developed countries in this respect. We also call upon creditors, both public and private, to take additional effective measures to facilitate the financing of our economic development, including access to grants and concessional resources for investment in critically needed infrastructure and development projects to avoid further indebtedness. The debt sustainability framework for least developed countries should systematically take into account their structural constraints and longer-term investment requirements for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

67. We invite the Secretary-General to constitute a high-level panel of experts, with adequate representation from least developed countries, on the debt crises of least developed countries with a view to undertaking the following tasks:

- (a) In-depth review of least developed countries' external debt and their Sustainable Development Goal financing needs;
- (b) Effects of pandemic on least developed countries' debt servicing capacity;
- (c) Recommendation of policy options at the national and international levels to urgently and effectively address the burgeoning external debt problem of least developed countries;
- (d) Submit its report to the Secretary-General for consideration by the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session.

68. We recognize the critical importance of the work of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries in improving their scientific research and innovation base, promoting networking among researchers and research institutions, helping least developed countries to access and utilize critical technologies, drawing together bilateral initiatives and support by multilateral institutions and the private sector, and implementing projects contributing to the use of science, technology and innovation for economic development in least developed countries. We note with appreciation the contributions made to the Bank by the host country, Turkey, and other countries, and call upon all members, especially donor countries and other development partners, to make substantive contributions to the Bank for its effective functioning. We also call upon Member States to raise awareness of the activities of the Bank in their countries and to collaborate with the Bank to ensure that technology is used as a critical tool for development. We therefore support the Bank as the focal point for least developed countries to strengthen their science, technology and innovation capacity towards building sustainable productive capacities and promoting structural economic transformation.

69. We underline the need for undertaking necessary measures to further accelerate FDI to least developed countries in areas where it contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including measures to reduce risks. We welcome the decision contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda to adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries and the offer to provide financial and technical support for project preparation and contract negotiation, advisory support in investment-related dispute resolution, access to information on investment facilities, and risk insurance and guarantees, such as through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. In this regard, we take note with appreciation of the initiatives undertaken by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States aimed at providing legal and technical support to least developed countries in investment-related negotiations and dispute settlement through the Investment Support Programme, implemented by the International Development Law Organization, and at improving the capacity of the investment promotion agencies of least developed countries to attract, diversify and retain FDI and derive maximum benefit from it. We take note with appreciation of the capacity development programme for the investment promotion agencies of least developed countries, developed by the Office jointly with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the International Labour Organization, the European Investment Fund and the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies, and call for financial support to this programme.

70. We recall target 17.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to “adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries”, and express deep concern at the lack of progress in its implementation. We call upon Member States to establish “an international investment support centre for the least developed countries” under the auspices of the United Nations to provide a one-stop arrangement to help to stimulate FDI in the least developed countries, which can make available the following interrelated and mutually reinforcing services, as already agreed upon in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda: (a) an information depository for investment facilities in the least developed countries; (b) technical support to assist the least developed countries in preparing project documents and negotiating complex large-scale contracts; (c) advisory support in dispute resolution; and (d) risk insurance and guarantees in close collaboration with the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

71. We recognize the contributions of migrants in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in both their countries of origin and destination, and note with concern the significant socioeconomic consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on migrant workers and refugees from the least developed countries, including those in the low wage informal economy, as well as the effects that the projected significant decline in remittances will have on the millions of people who depend heavily on them, and strongly urge partner countries to start taking action, specifically with regard to reducing to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances by 2030, and to facilitate the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

72. We call upon the international community to invest in innovative solutions that facilitate the mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of migrant workers at all skill levels, and promote demand-driven skills development to optimize the employability of migrants in formal labour markets in countries of destination and in countries of origin upon return, as well as to ensure decent work in labour migration.

73. We encourage appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of migrants in the development of local solutions and opportunities, as well as efforts to improve public perceptions of migrants and migration and to address the special situation and vulnerability of migrant women and girls, in particular migrant women employed in the informal economy and in less skilled work, to abuse and exploitation, underlining in this regard the obligation of States to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of all migrants.

74. We invite the international community and all relevant stakeholders, without prejudice to ongoing support, to cooperate and mobilize resources and expertise, including through financial and in-kind assistance, as well as direct aid to host countries, refugee populations, and countries of origin of refugees, especially least developed countries, with a view to enhancing the capacity of and reducing the heavy burden borne by countries and communities hosting refugees and displaced persons in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations while fully respecting the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality for humanitarian action.

75. We underline that North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation is vital to the least developed countries, noting that South-South cooperation is not a substitute but a complement to North-South cooperation, in particular with regard to technical assistance and sharing of best practices in terms of their development, especially in areas of productive capacity-building, infrastructure, energy, science and technology, trade, investment and transit transport cooperation, and we call upon the

countries of the South to further strengthen their provision of support to the least developed countries in all these areas in a predictable manner along the lines of the outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation.

76. We reaffirm that achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and fully realizing the human rights of all people are essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. We reiterate the need for gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic, environmental and social policies. We also recognize the need to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making, as well as equal access to leadership and representation for all women at all levels and in all spheres of society, and to strengthen their voice, while ensuring a safe and enabling environment for them and taking action to eliminate any barriers in this regard.

77. We will implement our commitments under various regional and international conventions to improve governance, ensure human rights and promote peace and security. Strengthening the rule of law, enforcing property rights, combating corruption, building strong institutions, fostering social cohesion and enhancing accountability in public service delivery are all essential to improving governance and thereby improving sustainable development. We express deep concern that least developed countries are hugely underrepresented in the decision-making processes of the global financial architecture. This needs to be addressed for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the global financial system. We call upon the international community to broadening and strengthening the voice and participation of least developed countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting and global economic governance.

78. We recognize that peace and security is a condition sine qua non for growth and sustainable development. Enhanced efforts are required to help to build durable peace and sustainable development in least developed countries. We call upon the international community, including the United Nations, to extend its support for strengthening national, subregional and continental efforts aimed at peacebuilding, including capacity for conflict mediation, resolution and management and post-conflict consolidation. We also recognize the importance of the participation of women and youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of peacebuilding processes. Special support should be provided to post-conflict countries to enable them to achieve a smooth transition from relief to development.

79. We acknowledge that ensuring equal access to vital services plays a crucial role in reducing disparities and promoting trust in public institutions and can therefore have significant implications for development, peace and security across the continent. In this regard, we reaffirm our commitment to placing social inclusion and transparency in the use of public resources at the centre of our agenda, in particular as we embark on building back better in the post-COVID-19 scenario.

80. We note with concern that most graduating least developed countries face a multitude of challenges, including poverty and inequalities, in particular gender inequalities, inadequate structural transformation and productive capacity, as well as vulnerability to economic and climatic shocks. Furthermore, we are concerned by the simultaneous loss of support measures specific to the least developed countries compounded by the negative social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

81. We call upon the international community to ensure an incentives-based international support structure to countries graduating and graduated from the category of least developed countries, including support for their smooth transition by development and trading partners, as well as the United Nations system, to make

graduation sustainable and ensure post-graduation development momentum and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

82. We emphasize that a successful graduation from the category of least developed countries needs to be based on a national smooth transition strategy, elaborated by each graduating country. We urge development and trading partners and the United Nations system to continue their support for the implementation of smooth transition strategies so as to avoid any abrupt reductions in either ODA, Aid for Trade or other technical and financial assistance provided. This includes the need for better planning and coordination of transition finance by ODA providers both during the preparatory period and in the post-graduation phase.

83. We request development and trading partners to extend to graduated countries the trade preferences, technical assistance and capacity-building programmes specific to the least developed countries for a period of 12 years after their graduation. We also invite all members of WTO to extend to graduated countries the special and differential treatment measures and exemptions specific to the least developed countries under the WTO agreements, understandings and other relevant decisions, including the flexibilities that the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and all technical assistance and capacity-building programmes and facilities specific to the least developed countries provided under the WTO system, for a period of 12 years after their graduation. We acknowledge the importance of subsidies in retaining and improving the competitiveness of least developed countries and graduated least developed countries, including in the export markets. We request the WTO members to ensure the continuity of the provision of subsidies specific to the least developed countries for the graduated least developed countries. We also call upon the development partners to continue to provide special climate-change related finance and technological support to graduated countries for a period consistent with their vulnerabilities, sustainable development needs and other national circumstances and emerging challenges.

84. We encourage the least developed countries and development partners to integrate graduation and smooth transition strategies into their respective national development and aid strategies, as appropriate, including capacity-building and technical assistance to diversify sources of financing, including blended finance and private finance.

85. We recognize the relevance of disaster risk and the impact of disasters in the process of graduation from the least developed country category of least developed countries, including the impact assessment of the likely consequences of graduation and the vulnerability profiles, and we encourage the integration of disaster risk reduction into the smooth transition strategies of graduating countries.

86. We recognize the need for enhanced support to countries before and after graduation, through appropriate predictable and additional incentives and support measures, including in the following areas:

- Technical assistance for preparing and implementing a smooth transition strategy, including capacity development and technical assistance for analysis and identification of support needs
- Enhanced availability of credit ratings and risk management measures, including through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
- Legal assistance to negotiate market access after the end of trade preferences that are granted based on status as least developed country

- Technical assistance to build and strengthen their intellectual property rights systems to enable them to comply with obligations related to intellectual property after graduation
- Provide expanded and specific access provisions for the climate-vulnerable graduated countries to the dedicated funds for tackling adverse impacts of climate change
- Provide access to concessional funds of international financial institutions and regional development banks by redefining eligibility threshold on the basis of multidimensional criteria beyond income-only measures
- Provide access to vertical funds, such as the Gavi Alliance, by redefining the upward eligibility threshold
- Extending access to Aid for Trade and the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries for 10 years after graduation.

87. We welcome the work of the United Nations inter-agency task force on graduation and smooth transition, led by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, to provide strengthened and coordinated United Nations system-wide support to the countries graduating from the category of least developed countries, and we invite the Office to advocate appropriate predictable and additional incentives and support measures for graduating and recently graduated countries (mentioned in the paragraph above) and mobilize additional international support for the implementation of the smooth transition strategies. We invite all relevant United Nations entities to collaborate under the inter-agency task force and to develop operational guidelines for their support for least developed countries, including assistance to graduating countries. We invite the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to support regional efforts to enable the attainment of sustainable development in the least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific through the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

88. We welcome the joint establishment of a Sustainable Graduation Support Facility, by the Office, as Chair of the inter-agency task force, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the secretariat for the Committee for Development Policy, as a concrete country-led solution of dedicated capacity development support. We call upon Member States to support this initiative operationalized under the umbrella of the inter-agency task force to further strengthen coordinated and coherent United Nations system support and bring together country-specific, integrated graduation-related advisory and capacity-building services, responding to the concerns of Member States regarding graduation and serving as a repository and clearing house of initiatives and projects pursued in support of these countries.

89. We call upon the international community to establish an international investment support centre for least developed countries and graduated countries involving all stakeholders to support bankable project preparation and contract negotiation, advisory support in investment-related dispute resolution, access to information on investment facilities, and risk insurance and guarantees in partnerships with the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency) and other relevant entities. In this regard, we invite donor countries to host the international investment support centre, provide financial support for its establishment and ensure its effective operation with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and building the resilience of the graduating and graduated countries against current and future shocks.

90. We call for a monitoring mechanism that is responsive to emerging crises and that better links monitoring to specific support, including possible extensions of the preparatory period. Enhanced monitoring by the Committee for Development Policy should include, among other things:

- Establishing country-specific crisis response processes within the monitoring mechanism to identify early warning signs of regression or risk of falling back into the least developed country category of least developed country and to trigger specific action and support to respond to crises and emergencies happening within the annual monitoring cycle
- Mobilizing existing crisis management expertise of the United Nations system and other international entities to assist countries in responding to emergencies and building resilience
- Utilizing the convening power of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, both in case of crisis and for regular monitoring
- Expanding coverage of annual monitoring reports and the preparation process.

91. We welcome the participation at this meeting of many development partners and, while appreciating their ongoing support, strongly call upon them for renewed and strengthened global partnerships for achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia-Pacific least developed countries. We collectively commit ourselves to finding lasting solutions to the complex and mutually exacerbating structural challenges and problems faced by least developed countries, which are the poorest and most vulnerable countries of the world.

92. We request the OHRLLS to extend necessary support to the least developed countries in the implementation and monitoring of the upcoming new programme of action for least developed countries for the decade 2022–2031, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework, as well as through coordination with various United Nations entities, raising global awareness, mobilizing international support and resources in favour of the least developed countries, building multi-stakeholder partnerships and reaching out to all stakeholders, including by establishing partnerships with civil society and the private sector, to enhance support for the least developed countries. In this regard, we strongly urge the Secretary-General and the Member States to strengthen the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to enable it to provide substantive support to least developed countries in their pursuit of meaningful engagement in the intergovernmental discussions and implementation of the programme of action for least developed countries and the 2030 Agenda.

93. We invite the Office to prepare a comprehensive road map for accelerated implementation of this programme of action, identifying specific roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders with a view to ensuring that the commitments in favour of least developed countries lead to concrete deliverables that would facilitate implementation of the programme of action and help least developed countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

94. We invite the Office to undertake research and analytical works to provide substantive support to least developed countries in group consultations and in their participation in other intergovernmental meetings and conferences to facilitate science- and evidence-based decisions in favour of least developed countries, taking into account new and emerging challenges and opportunities; support the works of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, high-level political forum on

sustainable development and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination as they relate to least developed countries; and foster debate and innovative thinking, promote consensus on ways forward and coordinate efforts to achieve the implementation of the programme of action. We also invite ESCAP to provide substantive support to Asia-Pacific least developed countries, including through research and analytical works.

95. We welcome, with warm appreciation, the decision of the Government of Qatar to host the Fifth United Nations Conference on least developed countries in Doha from 23 to 27 January 2021 at the Heads of State and Government level. We also commend the Government of Qatar for its generous support in undertaking substantive preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. We will participate in this summit at the Heads of State and Government level, and we invite our development partners to participate also at the Heads of State and Governments level and the agencies at the principals level. We also invite other stakeholders to participate at the highest possible level.

96. We express our profound gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh, the Office and ESCAP for jointly organizing this meeting. We also express our gratitude to the Governments of Turkey and Qatar for their generous contributions to the successful organization of the meeting. We note with appreciation the substantive support of the Office, in collaboration with the United Nations Office at Geneva. We also note with appreciation the active participation and substantive contributions of the Asia-Pacific least developed countries, development partners, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations. We express our thanks to parliamentarians and to the representatives of the private sector, civil society, youth and other stakeholders.
