



# General Assembly

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**Seventy-fourth session**

Agenda items 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 (a), 22, 23 and 24

**Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields**

**Information and communications technologies for sustainable development**

**Macroeconomic policy questions**

**Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of the International Conferences on Financing for Development**

**Sustainable development**

**Globalization and interdependence**

**Groups of countries in special situations: follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries**

**Eradication of poverty and other development issues**

**Operational activities for development**

**Agriculture development, food security and nutrition**

**Letter dated 1 October 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

In my capacity as Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau of the Least Developed Countries, I have the honour to transmit herewith the ministerial declaration adopted at the annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries, held in New York on 26 September 2019 (see annex).\*

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 (a), 22, 23 and 24.

(Signed) Perks Master Ligoya  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative  
of Malawi to the United Nations  
Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau  
of the Least Developed Countries

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\* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.



**Annex to the letter dated 1 October 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Ministerial Declaration of the Least Developed Countries**

**New York, 26 September 2019**

We, the Ministers and heads of delegation of the least developed countries, having met in New York on 26 September 2019 to provide strategic guidance for the full, effective and timely implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,

Recalling the Istanbul Declaration<sup>1</sup> and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,<sup>2</sup> adopted by the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 9 to 13 May 2011, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution [65/280](#) of 17 June 2011, in which the Assembly called upon all the relevant stakeholders to commit to implementing the Programme of Action, and recalling also the Political Declaration adopted by the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, held in Antalya, Turkey, from 27 to 29 May 2016, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution [70/294](#) of 25 July 2016,

Reaffirming the overarching goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries in order to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and enable graduation from the least developed country category,

Recalling also the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>3</sup> the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,<sup>4</sup> the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,<sup>5</sup> the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030<sup>6</sup> and the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III),<sup>7</sup>

Welcoming with appreciation the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,<sup>8</sup>

Adopt the following declaration:

1. We note with concern that, with only one and a half years left to implement the Istanbul Programme of Action, significant gaps persist between the goals and targets set out therein and the achievements made on the ground ([E/Res/2019/3](#)), We reiterate firm commitment to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9–13 May 2011 ([A/CONF.219/7](#)), chap. I.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., chap. II.

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution [70/1](#).

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution [69/313](#).

<sup>5</sup> See [FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1](#), decision 1/CP.21, annex.

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution [69/283](#), annex II.

<sup>7</sup> [E/2017/L.32], General Assembly resolution [71/256](#), annex.

<sup>8</sup> [A/74/69-E/2019/12](#).

within the remainder of the decade, including by conducting regular reviews with the full involvement of all key stakeholders;

2. We recognize that, the principle of country ownership and leadership remains crucial in order to accelerate progress towards sustainable development, and we recommit to take 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 IPoA;

3. We welcome the fact underscored by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030<sup>9</sup> and the New Urban Agenda (HABITAT-III) that the most vulnerable countries, including the least developed countries, deserve special attention and reflect the concerns and aspirations of these countries. We recall the decision contained in the 2030 Agenda that effective linkages will be made with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes, including on the least developed countries, underline the importance of strong synergy in the implementation of the recently adopted agendas and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the national and subnational levels. We encourage coordination and coherence in the follow-up of their implementation. In this regard, we request UN-OHRLLS to ensure synergy and coherence in the follow-up and review of the three Programmes of Action for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

4. We take note with appreciation of the Secretary-General's report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2019,<sup>10</sup> which indicates that there has been some progress in the achievement of the SDGs, such as in reducing extreme poverty and child and neonatal mortality, improving access to electricity and safe drinking water and expanding the percentage of terrestrial and marine protected areas (HLPF political declaration OP 19) but the progress is slow and uneven as LDCs remain far below in many of the targets of the SDGs. Vulnerabilities are high and deprivations are becoming more entrenched. Assessments show that we are at a risk of missing the poverty eradication target. Hunger is also on the rise. Progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is too slow. Inequalities in wealth, incomes and opportunities are increasing within and between countries. (HLPF Political Declaration OP 20). We recognize the urgent need to accelerate action on all levels and by all stakeholders, in order to fulfil the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda. (HLPF Political Declaration OP 24). We look forward to further progress in, inter alia, revitalizing and enhancing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development in least developed countries, aligning existing policies with the new global plan of action, increasing policy and system-wide coherence and integration for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, addressing existing and emerging challenges, enhancing national capacities for evidence-based and data-driven decision-making and favouring participatory, cooperative and enabling environments at all levels;

5. We call upon the international community, including the United Nations system, to realize its commitment to the full and timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to provide support for mainstreaming it into the national development policies and programmes of the least developed countries. We welcome the First SDG Summit held in New York on 24–25 September 2019 under the auspices of the General Assembly and its political declaration. We also call

<sup>9</sup> General Assembly resolution [69/283](#), annex.

<sup>10</sup> [E/2018/64](#).

upon it to live up to its commitments to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, in a spirit of global solidarity, focused in particular on building productive capacities, eradication of poverty, promotion of inclusive growth and implementation of social protection systems, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable. In this regard, we welcome the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development held in New York on 26 September 2019;

6. We are concerned that only a small number of the least developed countries are expected to reach the SDG target for GDP growth of “at least 7 per cent” in the near term. GDP growth in LDCs as a group is projected to decline to 4.6 per cent in 2019. Thus, SDG 8.1 (at least 7 per cent annual GDP growth in the LDCs) remains distant in LDCs (WESP, mid of 2019). This slowdown could be attributed to mounting trade tensions, high international policy uncertainty, and softening business confidence, which casts a shadow over efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Weaker economic growth puts at risk essential investments in areas such as education, health, climate change adaptation and sustainable infrastructure. We are concerned that longer-term growth projections point to 35 per cent of the population in LDCs remaining in extreme poverty by 2030;

7. We express deep concern that a growing number of people are currently facing Crisis food insecurity or worse. Globally, more than 113 million people across 53 countries experienced acute hunger requiring urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 2018. This is primarily fuelled by conflict, record-high food prices and abnormal weather patterns including prolonged drought conditions. Out of 53 countries facing Crisis food insecurity or worse, 29 are LDCs with a combined population of around 80 million.<sup>11</sup> We call upon the international community, especially our development partners, to enhance their financial and in-kind support to address this emergency;

8. We recognize the importance of safeguarding food security and nutrition in times of economic difficulty particularly for least developed countries. We will invest wisely during periods of economic booms to reduce economic vulnerability and build capacity to withstand and quickly recover when economic turmoil erupts. We recognize that agriculture plays a crucial role both in promoting food security and as the major economic activity for much of the population, with direct linkages to the eradication of poverty and hunger, rural development and gender equality and empowerment of women, as well as exports, commodity and production diversification, agro-processing capacity and an important source of foreign currency earnings. We will foster pro-poor and inclusive structural transformation focusing on people and placing communities at the centre to reduce economic vulnerabilities and set ourselves on track to ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition while “leaving no one behind”. 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, incorporation of 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;

9. We recognize the recent surge in modern technologies, including breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, driven by machine learning and deep learning, and facilitated by access to huge amounts of big data, cheap and massive cloud computing and advanced microprocessors. They offer the prospect of solutions and

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<sup>11</sup> 2019 Global Report on Food Crises JOINT ANALYSIS FOR BETTER DECISIONS, United Nations 2019

opportunities for sustainable development that are better, cheaper, faster, scalable and easy to use. Harnessing frontier technologies could be transformative in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and producing more prosperous, sustainable, healthy and inclusive societies. We note that the new technologies raise difficult questions about the broader impact of automation on jobs, skills, wages, and the nature of work itself. While modern technologies will replace some jobs, they are creating new work in industries that most of us cannot even imagine, and new ways to generate income;

10. We are concerned that while developed countries and countries at the technological frontier grapple with the opportunities and challenges associated with frontier technologies, many developing countries, especially LDCs, are yet to reap the benefits of these technologies. Furthermore, rapidly widening digital divide threatens to leave LDCs even further behind;

11. We recognize that the challenge to close the technological divide is formidable, but this is achievable. Time is propitious to adopt policies and measures to ensure that LDCs reap the potential offered by modern technologies and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. LDCs need to achieve coherence across policy areas such as industrial policies and those on science technology and innovation, foreign direct investment, trade, education and competition, along with macroeconomic policies, including fiscal policies. Furthermore, it is vitally important for LDCs to have access to modern electricity, broadband Internet connection, appropriate level of education and an enabling environment with regulatory regimes within which services can be offered;

12. We underline that the new reality created by frontier technologies calls for stronger and more effective international cooperation and global partnerships for development. We call upon the international community to come up with specific support measures for LDCs to enable them to reap the benefits of frontier technologies for achieving SDGs including through access to and adapting modern technologies, technological know-how, infrastructure and necessary logistics;

13. We stress that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its widespread, unprecedented impacts disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable countries, especially LDCs. The total per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in LDCs were 0.3 metric tonnes in 2014 compared to the world average of 4.97 per capita (WDI, WB). We recognize that 2018 was among the top four hottest years on record and that the global average temperature that year was approximately 1°C above pre-industrial baseline.<sup>12</sup> We are further apprehensive that the melting of sea ice and glaciers due to rising temperatures will have deep and far reaching impact. In 2018, countries around the world, especially a number of LDCs, experienced unprecedented and intense precipitation events causing heavy flooding and mudslides, devastating the lives of millions of people as well as the economy of many countries. There is mounting evidence that climate change is making these impacts more likely, and leading to greater loss and damage, further highlighting a need for urgent action to address loss and damage;

14. We take note of the stark warnings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that we are running out of time to avoid catastrophic runaway climate change and loss of nature. In the context of rapidly escalating climate risks, we face unique and unprecedented challenges as we work to end poverty and achieve sustainable development. A long-term focus on building resilience is the only way to deliver the SDGs while also averting and addressing large-scale loss and damage;

15. We welcome the agreement, reached in Katowice, on rules to implement the Paris Agreement, in particular on ways to measure and report on countries'

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<sup>12</sup> WMO <https://unfccc.int/news/wmo-confirms-past-4-years-were-warmest-on-record>.

emission-cutting efforts and invite all parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to fully implement this agreement. We must limit global warming to 1.5°C to protect lives and livelihoods, and this means global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions has to occur by 2020. We welcome the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on 1.5°C and call for the implementation of its recommendations. We recall the Climate Action Summit in September 2019 convened by the Secretary-General, which came up with concrete, realistic plans to enhance nationally determined contributions by 2020, with a view to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over the next decade, and to net zero emissions by 2050;

16. We welcome the specific initiatives presented by countries, groups of countries and other partners under the nine action areas at the Climate Action Summit, which have high potentials to curb greenhouse gas emissions and increased global action on adaptation and resilience. We are fully committed to do our part in addressing climate change in full compliance with our commitments under UNFCCC processes including the Paris Agreement. We urge all international partners to provide financial and technical support and technology transfer to LDCs in the spirit of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries to ensure that all LDCs can engage effectively in low emission and climate resilient development that will protect the lives of our populations, economies and systems;

17. We are deeply concerned that despite repeated commitments, there exists a large and persistent gap between support needed and support provided in terms of finance, technology and capacity building. We call upon the development partners to operationalize the Green Climate Fund fully and in a timely manner, with the goals of mobilizing \$100 billion per year by 2020, promoting and facilitating clean development mechanism projects in the least developed countries and addressing the needs of people displaced as a result of extreme weather events. We appreciate countries that have contributed to the Green Climate Fund and express concern that as of May 2018, the Green Climate Fund has only raised USD 10.3 billion equivalent in pledges from 43 state governments;<sup>13</sup> We stress the need for an ambitious replenishment for the Green Climate Fund in 2019, as a critical vehicle for financing the implementation of the Paris Agreement, taking into account the urgent and immediate needs of developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, including LDCs;

18. We note with appreciation that the 23rd meeting of the Board of the Green Climate Fund adopted ten new projects two of which were for least developed countries, and accredited four new entities. We further note with appreciation the efforts by the fund to put in place procedures to address stalemates and ensure that decisions are made at each meeting. We reiterate the importance of resilience and adaptation for least developed countries and look forward to accelerated access to the fund for least developed countries based on the 50 per cent of the adaptation allocation for particularly vulnerable countries, in particular the least developed countries;<sup>14</sup>

19. We note with concern that continued rapid population growth, which is currently 2.3 per cent annually in LDCs, presents challenges for sustainable development. The LDCs are among the world's fastest growing countries – many are projected to double in population between 2019 and 2050 and projected to grow to 3.0 billion in 2100. The concentration of population growth in LDCs will make it harder to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, combat hunger and malnutrition,

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.greenclimate.fund/how-we-work/resource-mobilization>.

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/2018/1674504/GCF\\_B.23\\_23\\_-Decisions\\_of\\_the\\_Board\\_twenty-third\\_meeting\\_of\\_the\\_Board\\_6\\_8\\_July\\_2019.pdf/de0260d1-736f-0dbf-695c-06684f805ad9](https://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/2018/1674504/GCF_B.23_23_-Decisions_of_the_Board_twenty-third_meeting_of_the_Board_6_8_July_2019.pdf/de0260d1-736f-0dbf-695c-06684f805ad9).

expand and update education and health systems, improve the provision of basic services and ensure that no one is left behind, unless specific measures are taken that will target these areas through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. (World Population Prospects 2019 and [E/2019/66](#));

20. We note that in the LDCs, the number of adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years is projected to grow from 207 million in 2019 to 336 million in 2050. Leveraging the opportunity presented by the demographic dividend depends critically on investing in the health and education (SDGs 3 and 4) of the young people who will soon join the labour force, and on ensuring their successful integration into the labour market, with full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8);<sup>15</sup>

21. We underline that technology is reshaping the skills needed for work, as robots and artificial intelligence have the potential to take over many of the existing jobs. Therefore, the demand for advanced cognitive skills, sociobehavioural skills, and skill combinations associated with greater adaptability are likely to increase. Investing in human capital, particularly early childhood education, to develop high-order cognitive and sociobehavioural skills in addition to foundational skills would be critically important. We need to invest in our people with a fierce sense of urgency, especially in health and modern education, which are the building blocks of human capital to harness the benefits of technology and to blunt its worst disruptions;<sup>16</sup>

22. We recognize the importance of building productive capacity as a critical enabler for the development and graduation of the least developed countries. We emphasize that the development of physical infrastructure is an important prerequisite for sustained economic growth and sustainable development, and that significant amount 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, as well as in procurement practices and policies. We call upon the development partners to provide enhanced financial and technical support to the least developed countries for their infrastructure development and management. We look forward to the effective functioning of the multi-stakeholder forum to bridge the infrastructure gap, which should give special priority to the needs and challenges of the least developed countries;

23. We recognize that a key structural challenge in most of the least developed countries (LDCs) is to raise the share of manufacturing output in gross domestic product (GDP). We would therefore further strengthen our efforts to accelerate capital accumulation, knowledge development, technology acquisition, expansion of higher-value-addition and employment creation in manufacturing sectors. We will also stimulate productive capacity building in labour-intensive manufacturing industries, with the objective of raising output and increasing the quality of those goods that are already produced and maximizing direct employment creation for low-skilled labour;<sup>17</sup>

24. We reiterate that official development assistance continues to be the largest and a critical source of external financing for the development of the least developed countries and that it provides a buffer to weather the impacts of the unstable and volatile global economic environment. We express our deep concern that total ODA

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<sup>15</sup> World Population Prospects 2019.

<sup>16</sup> World Development Report of the World Bank 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Achieving the SDGs in LDCs: A Compendium of Policy Options; UNCTAD 2018.

from OECD-DAC countries to LDCs decreased by 2.7 per cent in real terms in 2018<sup>18</sup> and remains below its 2011 level. The Share of ODA going to LDCs is only 0.09 per cent of the GNI of the DAC countries against the historical target of 0.15–0.20 per cent. We are further concerned that since 2010, the concessionality of bilateral ODA has declined, due to an increased reliance on concessional loans and a decline in grants with the share of loans in the composition of ODA to LDCs rose from 2.8 per cent to 8.3 per cent. The impact of this change is already manifested in the rise of the number of LDCs in debt distress situation.<sup>19</sup> We welcome the decision by the European Union, which reaffirms its collective commitment to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of the official development assistance/gross national income within the time frame of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and undertakes to meet collectively the target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries in the short term and to reach 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries within the time frame of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>20</sup> We also welcome the provisions of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda that encourage official development assistance providers to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries, and express encouragement to those providers that are allocating at least 50 per cent of their official development assistance to least developed countries. These are some qualitative and quantitative changes in the decades-long target on official development assistance for the least developed countries. We call upon all development partners to fulfil these targets;

25. We reiterate our call upon the donor countries to provide 0.20 per cent of their gross national income to the least developed countries by 2020 and 0.25 per cent of their gross national income by 2030 or at least 50 per cent of net official development assistance to the least developed countries;

26. We underline the fact that the allocation of global official development assistance resources should take into account the structural handicaps and constraints which are unique to the least developed countries. We call upon development partners to ensure the right balance in the allocation of official development assistance among various sectors, with particular focus on productive sectors, including infrastructure, agriculture and information and communications technology. We also call upon them to ensure quality of aid especially through predictability, using recipient country's system and eliminating tied aid;

27. International migration can be a transformative force, lifting millions of people out of poverty and contributing to sustainable development in both countries of origin and countries of destination. Facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration, while reducing incentives for irregular migration, is the best possible way to harness the full development potential of migration. Addressing the adverse drivers of migration, such as poverty, insecurity and lack of decent work, can help to make the option of remaining in one's country viable for all people. [World Population Prospects 2019] We welcome the targets contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development related to migration and remittances, and strongly urge partner countries to start taking action, specifically with respect to reducing to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances by 2030 and eliminating remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent, 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. We underline the

<sup>18</sup> SG's report on the FfD OP 44.

<sup>19</sup> IATF report 2019.

<sup>20</sup> See General Assembly resolution 69/313, annex.

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importance of putting in place specific incentive programmes to ensure that remittances are used for long-term investments in productive capacity building in LDCs;

28. We recognize the establishment of the International Migration Review Forum which will discuss and share progress on the implementation of all aspects of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, including as it relates to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

29. We recognize that while official development assistance must remain central and play a catalytic role, there is a need to tap additional resources, including through innovative financing mechanisms which can provide more stable and predictable resources for development and are based on new partnerships between countries at different levels of development as well as public and private actors. Specific mechanisms for innovative financing should be operationalized to mobilize additional resources for financing sustainable development. We note the potential of blended finance and other innovative finance. We are however concerned that like traditional sources of finance, blended finance instruments are also bypassing the LDCs. We stress that the innovative sources of financing should be additional, substantial and predictable and disbursed in a manner that respects the priorities and special needs of the least developed countries and does not unduly burden them;

30. We are concerned that trade growth is expected to slow in 2019 amid significant downside risks associated with escalating trade tensions. We note with appreciation that after three years of negative growth, LDCs' exports of goods and services increased by 13 per cent in 2017, thanks largely to increases in the prices of fuels and minerals. However, LDCs are still further away from the target of 2 per cent of global exports called for in the Istanbul Programme of Action and target 17.11 of the Sustainable Development Goals. We also note that in 2018, LDCs' exports of commercial services expanded by 16 per cent, reaching US\$ 39.8 billion, as a result, in 2018, LDCs' contribution to world services exports rose to 0.69 per cent. We call upon the members of the World Trade Organization to strongly commit to addressing the marginalization of least developed countries in international trade and to improve their effective participation in the multilateral trading system. We also call upon the members to fully and faithfully implement all the least developed country-specific provisions contained in the existing World Trade Organization agreements, ministerial decisions and declarations, including those contained in the Bali and Nairobi decisions. We invite the WTO secretariat to undertake a comprehensive study on the lack of progress in achieving SDG 17.11 and to make specific recommendations on the way forward to achieve this SDG by 2030;

31. We call upon developed country members and developing country members of the World Trade Organization declaring themselves in a position to do so to realize timely implementation of effective duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all products originating from all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, with a view to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals target of doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020;

32. We also call upon developed country members and developing country members of the World Trade Organization declaring themselves in a position to do so to take steps to facilitate market access for least developed countries' products, including by developing simple and transparent rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries, in accordance with the Decision adopted by members of the World Trade Organization at the Tenth Ministerial Conference, held in Nairobi;

33. We welcome the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which will address high trade costs incurred by LDCs and other developing

countries and facilitate the integration of these countries in regional and global value chains. We call upon the development and trading partners to provide targeted assistance and support to LDCs to help them build sustainable capacity to implement their commitments under the TFA, especially its Articles 13 and 21;

34. We request the WTO Members to assess the work done so far under the 1998 work programme on e-commerce, taking into account the actual needs of LDCs in terms of the digital divide, lack of regulation, lack of infrastructure, including lack of energy, electricity, internet penetration, and connectivity. We urge Members to examine issues of the digital divide and the ability of LDC suppliers to participate fairly in, and establish their own, e-commerce platforms in order to directly trade their goods and services. We also call on developed country Members to provide preferential market access to all business to consumer goods and services originating from all LDCs that are exported using an e-commerce- platform directly from LDCs suppliers. In this regard, we look forward to intensified and concerted action of the G20 countries to enhance the ability of least developed countries to more fully engage in digital trade, as committed in the G20 Summit in Germany in 2017;

35. We underline the importance of aid for trade initiatives in trade-related capacity-building; overcoming supply-side constraints; infrastructure development; and facilitating the integration of least developed countries' economies in regional and global trade. To this end, we call upon members to accord priority to the least developed countries' projects and ensure that at least 50 per cent of the aid for trade is allocated to least developed countries. We welcome the extension of the Enhanced Integrated Framework into phase two, and urge members to further intensify their efforts to secure the necessary level of contributions for the timely replenishment for effective implementation without any disruption of the Framework from 2016 to 2022;

36. We note that FDI inflows to LDCs as a group increased by 15 per cent to \$24 billion, representing 1.8 per cent of global FDI.<sup>21</sup> FDI in the LDCs remains heavily concentrated in the extractive industries, often providing few forward and backward productive linkages within the economy. It is a matter of concern that foreign investors overstate domestic risks and we invite national, regional and global development banks to play an instrumental role in mobilizing private capital for specific projects, through co-financing, providing risk guarantees and other instruments. We underline the need for undertaking necessary measures at all levels to further accelerate FDI to LDCs to meet their growing needs to realize the 2030 Agenda;

37. We welcome the decision contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 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 UN-OHRLLS aiming at providing legal and technical support to LDCs in investment-related negotiations and dispute settlement through the Investment Support Programme, implemented by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and at improving the capacity of the investment promotion agencies of LDCs to attract, diversify and retain FDI and derive maximum benefit from it. We commend the EU for its pledge to contribute

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<sup>21</sup> UNCTAD World Investment Report 2019.

1 million Euro for the implementation of the investment support programme and invite donors to make generous contribution to these initiatives;

38. We reiterate our call to the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to include the issue of investment promotion regimes for the least developed countries in the agenda of the Board, with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness of United Nations system support that can contribute to enhancing the flow of foreign direct investment to the least developed countries and the ability of those countries to attract such investment. We request the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly on the progress made in this regard. We take note with appreciation of the Capacity Development Programme for the investment promotion agencies of LDCs, developed by UN-OHRLLS jointly with UNCTAD, UNIDO, ILO, EIF and WAIPA; and call for financial support to this programme;

39. We recall the SDG target 17.5 which decides 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 take a decision at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly 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 stimulate foreign direct investment 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) provision of technical support to assist the least developed countries in preparing project documents and negotiating complex large-scale contracts; (c) provision of advisory support in dispute resolution; and (d) risk insurance and guarantees in close collaboration with the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development;

40. We are concerned that the total external debt stock in the least developed countries increased from \$155 billion in 2008 to \$293.4 billion in 2017, representing an average annual rate of growth of 7.4 per cent over that period. Furthermore, the ratio of debt service to exports sharply worsened over the period, rising from 4.1 per cent in 2008 to almost 9.4 per cent in 2018, a worrying development should that trend continue in the coming years. During the same period, debt service as a percentage of government revenue more than doubled, from 4.1 per cent in 2011 to 15.0 per cent in 2018, which diverted resources away from key social projects aimed at attaining sustainable development targets. These developments reflect continued reduction in the ODA flows and increased borrowing at commercial terms by those least developed countries over the past few years, incurring substantially higher debt servicing costs. Furthermore, there is increased risks from the changing composition of the public and publicly-guaranteed debt. The combined effect of those trends has led to a deterioration in both the numerator and denominator of key debt ratios, giving rise to increased fragility in the financial position of a number of least developed countries;

41. We are concerned that there are risks of re-indebtedness because of the huge development needs in the least developed countries and it is a matter of deep concern that in spite of the Initiatives,<sup>22</sup> many least developed countries still struggle with a high debt burden. As of 31 August 2019, 6 LDCs are in debt distress and 13 others of them are at high risk of debt distress.<sup>23</sup> We call upon development partners to take effective measures to cancel all multilateral and bilateral debts owed by all least developed countries to creditors, both public and private, and to arrange debt

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<sup>22</sup> HIPC Initiative and MDRI.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.imf.org/external/Pubs/ft/dsa/DSAList.pdf>.

standstill and debt swaps until the debt cancellation is fully realized. We also call upon creditors, both public and private, for additional effective measures to facilitate financing of our economic development, including access to both concessional and non-concessional resources for investment in critically needed infrastructure and development projects. The debt sustainability framework for LDCs should systematically take into account their structural constraints and longer-term investment requirements for the implementation of the SDGs;

42. We recognize the critical importance of the work of the Technology Bank for LDCs in improving least developed countries' scientific research and innovation base, promote networking among researchers and research institutions, help least developed countries access and utilize critical technologies, and draw together bilateral initiatives and support by multilateral institutions and the private sector, and to implement projects contributing to the use of STI for economic development in LDCs. We take note with appreciation of the contributions made to the Bank by the host country Turkey, Norway, Guinea, Bangladesh and India 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 members States to raise awareness on the activities of the Technology Bank in their countries and to collaborate with the Technology Bank to ensure that technology is used as a critical tool for development. We reiterate our call to the Secretary General to continue his efforts to support the Technology Bank especially in getting donor countries and other development partners to provide financial and in-kind assistance for the activities of the Technology Bank;

43. We note with concern that the multilateral risk reduction strategies and mechanisms are proven insufficient for LDCs, as they are often inadequately funded, call for cumbersome administrative procedures and regulatory reforms and require complex and technical proposals to access various funds. The General Assembly in its resolution [72/231](#) underlines the importance of improving the coordination and effectiveness of resilience-building initiatives for the least developed countries by leveraging existing measures at the national, regional and global levels to respond to various types of disasters and shocks, as elaborated in the report of the Secretary-General. We invite the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to set up an inter-agency working group to carry out this mandate. We also reiterate our invitation to the General Assembly to decide on the establishment of a "comprehensive multi-stakeholder resilience-building mechanism for LDCs", leveraging the existing measures and initiatives. The mechanism would entail a number of measures to be established or revitalized at the national, regional and global levels to respond to various types of disasters and shocks as elaborated in the report of the Secretary-General;

44. We recall the goal in the Istanbul Programme of Action to enhance capacities in energy production, trade and distribution with the aim of ensuring access for all by 2030, as well as the targets established under SDG 7 on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. We note with concern that while the average global electrification rate reached 88.8 per cent in 2017, the average access to electricity across LDCs was 51 per cent. Furthermore, 85 per cent of the population in LDCs remain without access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking relies on biomass for cooking, underscoring the urgent need for improved access to clean and modern cooking energy. We call upon all actors, including development partners, intergovernmental financial institutions, the private sector and civil society, to work together to ensure universal, seamless and affordable access to energy, especially renewable energy to LDCs, with the establishment of modern generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure. We also invite the newly revitalized UN

Energy, to focus on the specific sustainable energy challenges of the least developed countries with game-changing programmes and multi-stakeholder partnerships tailored to meet the needs of LDCs;

45. We emphasize that in a globalized and interconnected world, information and communication technologies are key to allowing individuals and businesses to participate in the knowledge economy including e-health, e-education, e-banking and e-governance. Affordable and easily accessible broadband connectivity is an important enabler of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. We are concerned that only 17.5 per cent of households in the least developed countries was online in 2017, displaying a very low level of penetration compared to 80 per cent developed countries and 40 per cent in developing countries.<sup>24</sup> We call upon development partners to substantially scale up their support to infrastructure development and make available the financial resources and expertise to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020 in line with target 9.c of the SDGs. We take note of the empirical study undertaken by the OHRLS and the International Telecommunication Union on the economic impact of broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS;

46. We reaffirm that achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and the full realization of 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;

47. We underline that North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation is vital to the least developed countries, particularly in regard to technical assistance, 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, we call upon the countries of the South to further strengthen their support provided 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;

48. We recall the ambitious goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action to enable half the number of least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020 and commit to take the steps necessary to complete the graduation process. We take note of the recent progress in graduation, as elaborated in the ECOSOC resolution,<sup>25</sup> including recommendation of graduation of Bhutan, Solomon Islands and Sao Tome and Principe; and deferral of the consideration of the graduation of Tuvalu and Kiribati to no later than 2021. We take note of the concerns expressed by graduating countries and we look forward to the outcome of the review of the graduation criteria by the CDP;

49. We acknowledge that the graduation of a country symbolizes its irreversible long-term socioeconomic progress prevailing over the structural handicaps to its socioeconomic development. However, it also brings a lot of challenges in the form of losing the entire package of LDC-specific benefits and waivers from compliance with international obligations and commitments. We note with concern that in most cases, the graduated countries still remain far below the benchmarks under most of the SDG indicators and continue to face insurmountable challenges and vulnerabilities to various shocks and crises;

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<sup>24</sup> E/2017/66.

<sup>25</sup> E/2018/L.22.

50. We note with appreciation that some development partners have extended some of the LDC-specific benefits to the graduated countries, taking into account the challenges they continue to face. However, most of these measures were taken on an ad-hoc rather than a systematic manner and benefits were granted by some partners rather than all. We reiterate that the existing processes related to graduation and smooth transition should be strengthened so that graduating and recently graduated countries do not face any disruption in their development trajectory, including challenges and uncertainties in achieving the SDGs;

51. We commend the Secretary-General for including the development of a package of incentives to further the development progress of graduating LDCs by the international development community as specific action in his Roadmap for Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 2019–2021 and call upon Member States to agree on such a package to ensure that the graduated countries continue to enjoy LDC-specific support in some critical areas of their economy for a certain period of time consistent with their development situations and needs. This can serve as a safeguard measure for the graduated countries to sustain their development path and not to relapse to the category of LDCs, thereby facilitating the achievement of the SGDs by 2030. This may include:<sup>26</sup>

- (a) Support to graduating countries in costing, mobilizing resources and monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, covering all 17 Goals.
- (b) More in-depth analysis of the potential impacts of graduation and identification of additional support to address the challenges of graduation.
- (c) Capacity-building support to enhance access to new sources of financing, including blended financing of domestic and international resources.
- (d) Facilitating increased access to other means of financing, including private finance, green bond financing and GDP-indexed bonds. Credit ratings and risk management measures, including through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, could be helpful in this respect.
- (e) Bringing together various stakeholders, including development and trading partners and the private sector to provide a platform for countries about to graduate to showcase progress and investment opportunities, for example an improved business environment and increased institutional capacity.
- (f) Legal assistance to transition from the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) Initiative to the enhanced Generalised Scheme of Preferences to mitigate abrupt loss of preferences as the GSP+ offers an additional preference (in some cases comparable with the EBA).
- (g) A transitional services waiver arrangement: The LDC services waiver is a new mechanism made available to and yet barely utilised by the next wave of graduates. Given the importance of services to trade nowadays, as organised within global value chains (GVC), a particular transitional arrangement could be secured for forthcoming graduates from LDC status for this preference.
- (h) More targeted Aid for Trade support: To improve the effectiveness of Aid for Trade disbursements pre- and post-graduation, the GVC approach towards assessment of needs for trade-related adjustment must be adopted. Investments in

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<sup>26</sup> Transitioning from LDCs: Achieving Trade-Related Adjustment, Enhanced Diversification and Reduced Economic Vulnerability by Jodie Keane and Howard Haughton, The Commonwealth Secretariat and the SG's report on Report of the Secretary-General: Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support ([A/73/291](#)).

infrastructure can further reduce trade costs in view of heightened competition after graduation.

(i) Enhanced technical assistance to LDCs to build and strengthen their intellectual property rights systems would enable them to comply with obligations related to intellectual property after graduation. The implementation of the intellectual property regime should be an integral part of the national smooth transition strategy, taking into account national circumstances, and assistance in this regard should be extended to the graduating country at an early stage;

52. We recall paragraph 26 of General Assembly resolution [68/224](#), in which the Assembly requests all relevant organizations of the United Nations system, led by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, to extend necessary support in a coordinated manner to the countries that have expressed their intention to reach the status of graduation by 2020 in preparing their graduation and transition strategy, and we invite the organizations of the United Nations system, led by the Office of the High Representative, to extend the necessary technical support to the countries aspiring to graduation in developing their graduation and smooth transition strategies. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the inter-agency task force on graduation, led by the OHRLS, and invite the IACG to continue its support to graduating and graduated countries, as and when requested. We call upon the development partners to provide support for the implementation of the graduation strategy with a view to enabling those countries to graduate from least developed country status. Likewise, we call for providing support for the implementation of the smooth transition strategy after graduation, taking into account each country's development situation, in order not to disrupt its efforts towards sustainable development; In this regard, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support;<sup>27</sup>

53. We recognize the urgent need to undertake a comprehensive review of the graduation criteria for least developed countries, taking into account the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. In this regard, we recall the decisions made in the Midterm Review that the review of the graduation criteria by the Committee for Development Policy should be comprehensive, taking into account all aspects of the evolving international development context, including relevant agendas and take note of the work programme of the CDP, adopted at its nineteenth session, to undertake a review of the basic structure of the least developed country criteria and its application principles aiming to identify additional indicators that could significantly improve the least developed country identification, which would become effective in 2021.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, we invite the CDP to provide significantly higher weightage to the environmental vulnerabilities, take note of its decision to implement a multi-year work programme for a comprehensive review of the least developed country criteria and look forward to its outcome;

54. We recognize that the United Nations development system is challenged to meet the growing demands for more varied assistance by doing more, quicker and better. We invite all organizations of the United Nations system and other multilateral organizations, including the World Bank Group and international and regional financial institutions, to contribute to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, including by implementing scaled-up programmes of financial and technical cooperation, to integrate it into their programmes of work, to participate

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<sup>27</sup> [A/73/291](#).

<sup>28</sup> [E/2017/33](#).

fully in its review at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels, and to include in their annual reports to the Executive Boards and to the Economic and Social Council the progress made in this regard, as mandated by the Council in paragraph 9 of its resolution [2013/46](#);

55. We note that the share of expenditure for operational activities for development of the United Nations system in the least developed countries rose from 46% in 2016 to 47.7 per cent in 2017, while noting that this increase falls short of the 51 per cent contributed by the system in 2012. In this regard, urge the United Nations development system to continue to prioritize allocations to least developed countries including by allocating at least 75 per cent of their programme resources in least developed countries,<sup>29</sup> while reaffirming that the least developed countries, as the most vulnerable group of countries, need enhanced support to overcome structural challenges that they face in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and request the United Nations development system to provide assistance to graduating countries in the formulation and implementation of their national transition strategies and to consider country specific support for graduated countries for a fixed period of time and in a predictable manner;

56. We welcome the General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) of 31 May 2018 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and emphasize the importance of its full and timely implementation. We emphasize that eradicating poverty and hunger, access to public health, education and other social services, addressing the impacts of climate change and building productive capacity and infrastructure in LDCs should remain at the centre of the United Nations development cooperation efforts. The system also needs to support LDCs in data, statistics, knowledge platforms and the national implementation of the Goals through monitoring and reporting;

57. We request the OHRLS to extend necessary support to the least developed countries in the implementation and monitoring of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 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 three groups of countries;

58. We recall paragraph 26 of General Assembly resolution [67/220](#), in which the Assembly invites the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to include implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action as a standing item on the agenda of the Board, and we call upon the Board to continue to follow up on the implementation of the Programme of Action and to keep the Assembly informed on a regular basis;

59. We recognize that the income-based classifications of countries are becoming less and less relevant and unable to take into account fragility and other structural constraints, while least developed countries represent the most homogenous group of countries. We therefore stress that the least developed country category should be universally recognized to facilitate the coordinated and coherent follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the international development agenda in these countries;

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<sup>29</sup> Currently 74 per cent of core programme resources of the United Nations Development Programme is allocated for work in least developed countries.

60. We take note of the survey conducted by the CDP on reasons and consequences of the non-application of the least developed country category by United Nations development system entities and its findings that United Nations development system entities should not only to recognize the least developed countries category, but also to consistently apply the least developed countries category by providing international support measures, and request the United Nations development system entities to adopt common guidelines in this regard. We also request international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and regional development banks, to consider the least developed country category in their procedures for allocating resources and to design policies that consider the special situation of the least developed countries;<sup>30</sup>

61. We express deep concern that least developed countries are hugely underrepresented in the decision-making processes of the global financial architecture. Forty-seven least developed countries, with 13 per cent of the global population, collectively enjoy only 3.27 per cent of the voting power of the International Monetary Fund and 3.78 per cent of the voting power of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This needs to be addressed for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the global financial system. We recommit to broadening and strengthening the voice and participation of least developed countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting and global economic governance. We invite the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and other main international regulatory standard-setting bodies to continue efforts to increase the voice of least developed countries in norm-setting processes to ensure that their concerns are taken into consideration;

62. We welcome the resolutions of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC on the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs including its scope; duration; national and regional reviews; preparatory committee meetings and the contributions by the United Nations Development System and other international organizations including the World Bank Group and the IMF;

63. We want to see an evidence-based bottom-up approach in preparing for the Conference, in which national level experience, best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the IPoA should serve as a key building-block for the next programme of action. The Conference should also address the new and emerging challenges such as the devastating impacts of climate change, population dynamics and leverage the enormous potentials offered by the frontier technologies, which will accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in LDCs;

64. We request the Secretary-General to mobilize the international community including the UN system in favour of the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs and secure a large number of participants at the highest political level in the Conference to be held in Doha, Qatar in 2021;

65. We request the President of the 74th Session of the General Assembly to make substantive contributions to the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs, including by organizing a dedicated high-level event of the General Assembly focusing on the key priorities of LDCs in preparation of the outcome of the Conference. We also request the President of the ECOSOC to make similar contributions to the preparatory process of the LDC-V;

66. We welcome with appreciation the generous offer of the Government of Qatar to host the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

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<sup>30</sup> E/2017/33.

in Doha at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government, in 2021 for a duration of five working days;

67. We call upon Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, major groups and other donors to contribute in a timely manner to the trust fund in support of activities undertaken by the Office of the High Representative to support the implementation, follow-up and monitoring of the Istanbul Programme of Action, the preparation of the Fifth United Nations Conference on LDCs, and the participation of the representatives from the least developed countries in the high-level political forum on sustainable development of the Economic and Social Council as well as in other relevant forums and the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs and its preparatory processes;

68. We most sincerely acknowledge the supportive role being played by the Group of Friends of Least Developed Countries, and invite the Group to further strengthen its support for the effective realization of the Istanbul Programme of Action, the outcome of the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of all other international and regional conferences and processes as they relate to the least developed countries. We especially invite the Friends of LDCs to actively engage and continue to provide their support to LDC-V and its preparatory process.

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