

Asia-Pacific LDCs' graduation, trade and pandemic

27 January 2021, 15.00-17.00 (GMT+7) on Zoom

The graduation of the LDCs is expected to mark a significant achievement in their development path. However, despite new prospects, LDC graduation also presents some challenges in meeting the demands of a successful transition to the next stages of socio-economic development. Upon the graduation, LDCs will lose a number of support measures after specific transition periods. These support measures include market access privileges, various special and differential treatment provisions with respect to trade, concessions and priority access to development financing, and other modes of developmental support. Therefore, to address loss of access to support measures, graduating LDCs require strategies for sustainable development during and after the graduation process.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its pervasive socio-economic impacts may have detrimental effects on graduation planning and preparations, with LDCs with inherently weaker coping capacities projected to have disproportionately larger impacts. The destruction and uncertainty caused by the current crisis, the full extent of which is yet to be understood, is likely to worsen pre-existing LDC vulnerabilities and slow down their recovery. In the graduation processes and timelines, this unprecedented situation needs due consideration, allowing sufficient flexibility and additional transitional support as needed by graduating LDCs to resolve the challenges faced by the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, this session focuses on Asia-Pacific LDCs' graduation and trade in the times of pandemic. The structure of the session is as follows:

- **Opening remarks: Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu**, Under-Secretary-General and the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (recorder-message).
- **Keynote address: Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya**, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh and a Member of the Committee of the Development Policy, United Nations
- **Remarks: Mr. Taufiqur Rahman**, Head, LDC Unit, Development Division, WTO (on Trade impacts of COVID-19 and evolving discussion in WTO)

Roundtable

Panellists:

H.E. Ms. Mere Falemaka, Ambassador, Permanent Delegation of the Pacific Island Forum to the World Trade Organization and the United Nations in Geneva

Dr. Paras Kharel, Research Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM)

Ms. Christine Bowers, Head of Project at GIZ, Cambodia

Ms. Su Thet Hninn, Assistant Director, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar

Moderator: Dr. Mia Mikic, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, ARTNeT Coordinator, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific