Statement by

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at the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries
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Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar

Honourable Ministers

Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I must thank ESCAP for the opportunity to contribute to this year’s virtual session.

Madam Executive Secretary, in my role as High Representative as well as personally, I thank you for the special focus and priority you give to issues of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.

All of us remain deeply concerned by yet another resurgence of COVID-19 with new and worrying variants.

While we have some signs of improvement in a few places, too many countries remain under high alert and stress.

At first glance, one could be tempted to say that after all the number of casualties might not be that high in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.

As we all know, and while we all here have deep sympathy for too many losses of life and the suffering of families and relatives that comes with it, the pandemic has brought about and will continue to have complex and far-reaching impacts on all our lives.

The LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS face disproportionately the financial, economic, and social impacts of this global crisis.

Already now we see poverty on the rise and malnutrition has made a return!

The fiscal space of governments shrinks rapidly as revenue from internal and external sources keep diminishing and an overly concerning situation.

Already prior to the pandemic, it was evident that limited progress had been achieved in the implementation of SDGs.

The United Nations already had alerted that the goals of the 2030 agenda were unlikely to be achieved in many of the countries.

Now, we see the onset of reversal of what had been achieved and there is a real danger that once again the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS will be left behind.
I can only call again on ALL, that these countries need urgent and dedicated attention in the period we now have, of less than a decade, to achieve this promise that we made to leave no one behind.

Needless to say, equitable and affordable access to vaccines is the top priority.

The LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS continue to face enormous difficulties in accessing vaccines let alone roll out of vaccination programs.

Vaccination programs have barely commenced and we must not underestimate the logistics complexities from securing appropriate vaccines to vaccinating people.

We need faster action, otherwise LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS will face serious humanitarian and economic misery for months if not years with all the instabilities inherent in such situations.

Currently, the emergency recovery measures countries engage in are highly constrained by the extremely limited resources available, and often the limited safety nets available, are not sufficient.

Beyond the public health imperative, the key priority is to ensure that LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS have the fiscal space to vaccinate, recover, and ultimately invest in the SDGs and the globally agreed-on climate goals.

This demands that beyond domestic action, existing funding commitments are met, and that new, innovative financing is made available.

Indeed, the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS are faced with unsustainable external debt burdens.

Over half of the countries, are at high risk of debt distress or in a debt distress situation.

While DSSI and other debt-relief measures are welcome initiatives, countries need comprehensive debt relief measures through a revitalized global debt architecture.

The ongoing discussions on the allocation of $650 billion SDR are encouraging. The spring meeting of the Bretton Woods Institutions has already agreed on this new allocation of SDRs.

However, it remains of concern that LDCs, as per their quota shares, will only receive 3.5 per cent of this allocation.

LLDCs and SIDS will also receive only a meager share of the new allocation.

It is important to have a decision on the reallocation of excess SDRs to LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.

As far as OHRLLS is concerned, the support to LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS has been stepped up.

A series of virtual briefings took place. The LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS groups issued statements and positions on COVID-19 reflecting their special challenges and needs and what must be done to address the impacts of the pandemic and build back better.
This brings me to an update on where we stand in the preparations for LDC5.

The Organizational session of the PrepCom and the Africa regional review was held in February 2021. Both meetings were successful in terms of their high level of participation and the depth of substantive discussions.

On 23 April, the President of ECOSOC organized a Special Meeting on LDCs and LLDCs on the theme “Financing resilient recovery from cascading effects of COVID-19 in LDCs and LLDCs”.

The President of the General Assembly and the President of ECOSOC will organize a half-a-day event on 18 June 2021 with a focus on the accelerated implementation of the SDGs in LDCs in the context of COVID-19.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Review Meeting will be held in Dhaka from 28 June to 2 July jointly with ESCAP and Bangladesh in a hybrid format.

The Dhaka meeting will focus on graduation in the context of COVID-19.

10 out of 12 Asia-Pacific LDCs (including Yemen) are at some point in the graduation pipeline.

Vanuatu just graduated on 4 December 2020.

The Dhaka meeting will focus on strategies and policy measures at the national, regional, and global levels to ensure smooth transitions and accelerated implementation of the SDGs in the added context of the devastating impacts of COVID-19.

The outcome of this meeting will be a Ministerial Declaration of LDCs, in turn, to serve as an important basis for the outcome of LDC5.

We invite you all to actively participate in this meeting.

OHRLLS convenes an Academic Conference in Helsinki, Finland at the end of August. The idea is to stimulate new thinking on key thematic areas for LDC5.

The two Preparatory Committee Meetings for LDC5 will be held in New York from 24-28 May 2021 and 26-30 July 2021, respectively.

The first PrepCom meeting will feature a high-level opening session and six interactive thematic sessions. Once again, I count on your active participation and contributions to the PrepCom meeting.

The UN Development System and the RC system are also fully engaged in the preparatory process. Six rounds of agency meetings have already taken place.
Last but not least, OHRLLS prepares a series of reports and analytical papers to inform the discussions for LDC5.

I also wish to acknowledge the invaluable work by ESCAP with its Asia-Pacific Countries with your Special Needs Development Report 2021 looking at strengthening the Resilience of Least Developed Countries in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic.

The report provides an excellent account of the status of implementation of the IPoA in the Asia Pacific LDCs, elaborates on the impacts of COVID-19, and comes up with important recommendations we must include in the next programme of Action for LDCs.

The outputs from all these meetings and reports will form the basis of the LDC5 zero draft outcome document.

The LDCs group is expected to take the lead in preparing the zero draft and is expected to submit it by mid-June.

I also wish to acknowledge the strong commitment of the LDC5 host country, Qatar.

Organizational preparations are proceeding rapidly. Qatar will support the participation of LDCs in the Conference.

For the LLDCs, we are more than halfway on the road to implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

OHRLLS, together with the LLDCs group, developed a UN Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA.

The roadmap builds on the outcome of the Midterm Review.

The roadmap will also assist in addressing the impact of COVID-19 in LLDCs, especially on the impacts relating to transit and cross-border collaboration.

For SIDS, we are working on the development of a multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) for small island developing States (SIDS).

A series of technical webinars among peer institutions have been organized.

Participating institutions have been working on approaches to vulnerability indexes and will present their work and exchange views and perspectives to inform the Secretary-General’s report.

OHRLLS also supports the work of the steering committee on SIDS partnerships to foster new and follow-up on existing partnerships to accelerate the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

We have all faced an exceedingly difficult year, and we are still going through and will continue to go through challenging times.
In closing, I can only say again that it is by working together in genuine partnerships and in a spirit of global solidarity that we can overcome a challenge of unknown proportions and ensure that we do not once again leave the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS behind.

Thank you.