

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
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Report on Bangladesh's Participation in the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)

4-9 March 2023, Doha, Qatar

The second part of the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) was held in Doha, Qatar from 04 to 09 March 2023. A high-level delegation from Bangladesh led by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated in the event. Other than the government delegation, representatives from the private sector, CSOs, youth organizations, media, and development partners participated in the event. The final text of the Doha Program of Action (DPoA) was adopted at this Conference. The major objectives of this Conference were to: identify actions and partnerships at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government to deliver on this agenda; undertake an appraisal of the implementation of the IPoA; mobilize additional international support measures (ISMs) for LDCs; and agree on a renewed partnership between LDCs and DPs to overcome structural challenges, eradicate poverty, and achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from the LDC.



Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. António Guterres meets with Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the LDC5 Conference in Doha, Qatar

Lauding Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visionary leadership during the Conference, world leaders greatly hailed the recent socio-economic progress of Bangladesh. They highly appreciated the development initiatives taken by her government for the betterment of Bangladesh's people and expressed their expectations that Bangladesh would continue its progress under the leadership Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Key discussions and takeaways from the LDC5 conference

A. Summary of discussions

After two pandemic-induced postponements, more than 5,000 participants including 47 Heads of State and Government from the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) came together in Doha, Qatar for the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs. Like the Fourth LDC Conference that took place in 2011, this once-in-a-decade forum sets the framework for how the international community will work to support the countries at the risk of being left behind over the coming ten years. Leaders from different nations agree on plans to deliver the Doha Programme of Action.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaking during the Opening Plenary Meeting of the LDC-5 Conference

World leaders have called for a radical transformation of the global financial order and a renewed commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and acknowledged that the 46 countries in the least developed category have been given unfair treatment and called for a change in the deeply dysfunctional system. The UN Secretary General urged the developed countries to live up to their commitment to provide LDCs with 0.15 to 0.20 percent of their gross national income for official development assistance (ODA). The Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina said that the country does not need charity and stressed that LDCs are seeking their just dues under international commitments. Hon'ble Prime Minister urged to devise new and innovative support measures for the graduating and graduated LDCs and called upon the international community to gradually phase out the ISMs in the post-graduation phase. She called for cooperation from the international community amid the current geopolitical tension and global economic shock and working together to build a strong global partnership.

Heads of State, ministers, and delegates urged for more investment in LDCs in the first high-level thematic roundtable. They acknowledged the progress made in critical sectors like education and gender parity but also highlighted persistent challenges. The speakers noted significant financing and social obstacles and appealed to the international community to fulfill their financing commitments. The last 3 years have seen a rise in extreme poverty and crisis due to the pandemic

and ongoing conflict. Germany confirmed to dedicate another €200 million in 2023 for financing for least developed States while other developed country also assured their continuous support.

The second high-level thematic roundtable stressed the need to transform least developed countries into knowledge societies by harnessing science, technology, and information. Heads of State, ministers, and delegates showed optimism about science and technology's potential to improve living standards but are concerned about the growing digital divide between rich and poor countries. Women's lack of participation in science and technology education is also a concern, and many governments are taking steps to address this issue. Delegates also highlighted examples of technological innovation in public services.

World leaders warned of an "inequality crisis" faced by 46 LDCs comprising 14% of the global population. These countries face serious impediments that hamper their ability to progress economically and graduate from the least developed country category. The pandemic of inequality, lack of access to vaccines, technology, finance, and opportunities, as well as the climate crisis, disproportionately affect LDCs. The process of graduation to a higher stage must be re-evaluated to ensure sustainability and developed countries must contribute 0.7% of their GNI to official development assistance. Graduated countries should not lose specific treatment as their vulnerability is still evident. The countries want more investments rather than aid.

During the third thematic roundtable, the speakers emphasized the revitalization of the stagnant economies of numerous LDCs necessitates structural transformation, involving measures such as capacity-building, industrial development, export diversification, and increased market access. Speakers noted that these countries face challenges such as low productivity, debt distress, inflationary pressure, weak investment, and low levels of human capital development. Ministers and delegates detailed national initiatives and development plans geared towards structural transformation, including efforts to integrate into global value chains, reduce dependency on imported goods and diversify exports. The Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal said that the three main challenges preventing progress towards structural transformation are an insufficient investment in human capital development, an inability to sufficiently exploit scientific, technological, and innovative capacities and insufficient infrastructure.

Despite the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defining international trade as "an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction," the LDCs share of merchandise exports has remained static at 1% over the past decade. The speakers urged support, investment, connectivity, human capital, and technology transfer to enhance trade-related infrastructure building and productive capacity in the fourth thematic roundtable. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of building strong partnerships for food security and digital connectivity, encouraging these countries to strengthen their trade capacity and fortify their dialogue with the private sector. The Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh, co-chair of the roundtable, emphasized that LDCs must focus on enhancing their trade-related infrastructures and productive capacity; and to achieve these, LDCs require support, investment, human capital, and technology transfer. She

also mentioned that Bangladesh is implementing various initiatives and engaging more with the private sector.

Speakers stressed the importance of overcoming the digital divide through investment in broadband infrastructure to help those living in LDCs to leverage economic opportunities in an increasingly digital world. Several countries, including Sweden, Estonia, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, India, and Denmark offered to share their development experiences with the LDCs. The need for international organizations and donor partners to assist least developed countries with smart investments and support for the development of broadband infrastructure was also emphasized. Additionally, speakers called for the international community to ensure that graduation from LDC status is sustainable and irreversible.

At the fifth roundtable, the speakers called for urgent action to assist vulnerable States, emphasizing the importance of the involvement of everyone, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, and different minorities. LDCs aspire to drive high rates of economic growth and structural transformation. Support is needed to secure climate finance and prepare adaptation plans and projects for financing. The developed countries' inability to implement previous commitments was criticized in the round table. It was also discussed that the current situation is unjust, with the least developed countries generating 4 percent of the world's greenhouse gases but being hit hardest by the effects of climate change. LDCs are among the most vulnerable nations on the planet to the adverse impacts of climate change.

During general debates, heads of country delegations also stressed the importance of accurately identifying the specific interests of each country and supporting them in a tailored manner. Representatives from Korea, Luxembourg, Japan, Switzerland, IAEA, WIPO, and the WTO detailed their country's/organization's support for LDCs. The private sector was highlighted as an important player in providing necessary support.

At the sixth thematic round table, the speakers agreed that international solidarity is essential for transitioning from a pandemic-prone world to a pandemic-proof one. The Prime Minister of Tonga, Siaosi Sovaleni, emphasized the importance of building national resilience to tackle current and future global pandemics and climate change. Other speakers also highlighted the need for sustainable recovery, access to vaccines, and enhanced disaster mitigation capacities. The panelists discussed the importance of responsive national planning, access to affordable and sustainable energy, and the need for funding flows from the global North to the global South.

The challenges faced by LDC in accessing concessional financing and insufficient external development aid were discussed in the seventh roundtable. LDCs' access to financing is affected by low-income levels, weak market infrastructure, and high dependency on external development financing. The conference stressed the need for mobilizing domestic resources, increasing government revenues, promoting investment, and fighting against illicit financial flows to offset these challenges. It was also emphasized that official development assistance (ODA) is the largest source of external financing for many LDCs, and that there should not be any reduction in ODA

flowing to these countries in the years to come. They discussed the need for greater alignment of development financing with LDC priorities. Panelists discussed the importance of mobilizing foreign direct investments (FDI) and investment from the private sector to reduce dependency on ODA.

The eighth and final roundtable discussed the need for sustainable and irreversible graduation from the least developed countries category. The speakers called for innovative financing and support measures from developed countries, which they said have fallen on deaf ears, to help these countries achieve their objectives. They also discussed the need for country-specific support for graduating and graduated countries to address their distinct challenges. Speakers emphasized and echoed the warnings that LDCs are struggling and even backsliding under the burden of multiple crises, and that graduation itself is not a panacea without support to make it sustainable. Panelists further called for evolved graduation financial criteria to make the process smoother for the LDCs by supporting their efforts to invest in people, leverage the power of science, technology, and innovation, fast-track structural transformation, and enhance participation in international trade. The graduating cohort of 2021 – Bangladesh, Nepal, and Lao PDR – called for renewed support from the international community through an eight-point joint statement (attached).

The LDC5 ended with member states committing to measures to deliver on the Doha Programme of Action (attached), a ten-year plan to put the world's 46 most vulnerable countries back on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Doha Political Declaration (attached) was adopted, which reinforces the international community's commitment to advancing the concrete deliverables outlined in the Doha Programme of Action, which includes the development of a food stockholding mechanism for the LDCs; an online university focusing on STEM education, especially for women and girls; an international investment support center; a sustainable graduation support facility (iGRAD); and comprehensive multi-hazard crisis mitigation and resilience-building measures.

B. Key commitments made by the international community

The international community made some commitments during LDC5 including:

- Qatar announced a financial package of \$60 million: \$10m to support the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and \$50 million to help build resilience in the LDCs.
- Germany dedicated €200 million in new money in 2023 for financing for least developed countries.
- Canada announced \$59 million to deliver Vitamin supplements in 15 LDCs and ecosystem conservation in Burkina Faso.
- The EU Commission announced cooperation agreements advancing sustainable investments in Africa totaling more than €130 million of investment.
- Finland announced an annual event called the United Nations LDC Future Forum in Helsinki, with the Office of the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked

Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States – OHRLLS, to ensure the latest thinking and research is being put to work to ensure progress on the most vulnerable states.

- The Green Climate Fund announced a new project to give \$80 million in equity to offer green guarantees to business in LDCs and bring down the cost of capital.
- The United Nations World Tourism Organization, announced a new €10 million Tourism for Development Fund for LDCs, supported by TUI Care Foundation, that will invest by 2030 to support sustainable tourism in LDCs as a key driver of development.
- The government of Kazakhstan pledged \$50,000 to continue its work supporting the most vulnerable member states of the United Nations.
- The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced a major new \$800 million loan package for the Least Developed Countries.

C. Joint side event by Bangladesh, Nepal, and Lao PDR

On the first day of the conference, a joint side event titled "Sustainable and Smooth Transition for the Graduating Cohort of 2021" was organized by the governments of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Lao PDR, with support from their respective Resident Coordinator's Offices. The event was attended by heads of country delegations, including the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh H. E. Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal H. E. Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of Lao PDR H. E. Saleumxay Kommasith. Executive Secretary of UNESCAP H.E. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana delivered the welcome remarks, while Assistant Secretary-General of the Development Coordination Office of the United Nations Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco moderated the event.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaking during the Joint Side Event on "Sustainable and Smooth Transition for the Graduating Cohort 2021"

As Bangladesh, Lao PDR, and Nepal all prepare Smooth Transition Strategies for graduation under unprecedented circumstances due to COVID-19 and recent geopolitical tension, the LDC5 Conference provided an opportunity to clearly articulate national approaches to address the challenges and practically ground elements from the Doha Programme of Action. The conference provided an opportunity for these countries to share their national approaches to addressing the

challenges associated with graduation and to ground their plans in the Doha Programme of Action. Speaking during the event, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh said that the global partnership must carry a meaning to the LDCs like Bangladesh so that no challenge could upset their progress to attain non-LDC developing country status.

The side event served as a follow-up to a joint workshop held in Bangkok in August 2022, which aimed to identify areas of collaboration between the three countries during the preparation and implementation of their smooth transition strategies. At the side event, the main objectives were to foster continued collaboration among the graduating countries, establish support mechanisms for the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action through the development and implementation of smooth transition strategies, and call for international support measures to meet the national requirements identified by the graduating cohort of 2021.

During the side event, the Secretaries from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Lao PDR presented their progress on Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) preparation, the status of implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, and expectations for international community support during graduation. ERD Secretary Ms. Sharifa Khan delivered a presentation on Bangladesh's preparation for LDC Graduation. The three countries issued a joint statement with an eight-point call for action to the international community, which is attached for reference.

Additional Secretary, ERD and National LDC Focal Point of Bangladesh and UNRC Bangladesh participated in the Meeting of the UNRCs and National Focal Points from LDCs. National Focal Point of Bangladesh highlighted the measures undertaken by the government for a smooth transition while urging the international community to extend the ISMs for a certain period after graduation.

D. Participation of Bangladesh in different sideline events of LDC5

Throughout the conference, Bangladesh played a prominent role. Hon'ble Prime Minister co-chaired the fourth high-level thematic roundtable on the theme "Enhancing the participation of LDCs in international trade and regional integration". The delegation also hosted several side events. Principal Secretary to Hon'ble Prime Minister, Finance Secretary, and ERD Secretary participated in Round Table 3, 7, and 8 respectively. The Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh organized two side events. During the official deliberations, Bangladesh emphasized its impressive economic development trajectory and issued a call-to-action to the international community for continued support in areas such as trade, technology transfer, and development cooperation.