



## UN opens conference on unlocking economic potential of world's poorest countries



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) addresses the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs in Istanbul, Turkey

9 May 2011 –

A major United Nations conference aimed at devising a new strategy to help the world's poorest countries unlock their economic potential and accelerate development opened today in Turkey, where heads of State and senior officials from international organizations are among 7,000 participants in attendance.

The Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul will assess the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action – the outcome document adopted at the last such conference, held in 2001 – and try to reach agreement on a new set of support measures for the 48 nations classified as LDCs.

**Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon **told** the opening session that LDCs should not be seen as “poor and weak” but countries with “vast reservoirs of untapped potential” that are home to nearly 900 million people or 12 per cent of the global population.

“Investing in LDCs is an opportunity for all,” said Mr. Ban. “First, it is an opportunity to relieve the world’s most vulnerable people of the burdens of poverty, hunger and needless disease. This is a moral obligation.

“Second, investing in LDCs can provide the stimulus that will help to propel and sustain global economic recovery and stability. This is not charity, it is smart investment.

“Third, it provides a massive opportunity for South-South cooperation and investment. The world’s rapidly emerging economies need both resources and markets.”

The Secretary-General pointed out that LDCs “represent a vast and barely touched area for enterprise... for business. We have here, this week, all the ingredients for success... for a genuine partnership for development.”

Outlining some of the challenges facing LDCs, Mr. Ban noted that the countries suffer disproportionately from preventable diseases and are most vulnerable to natural disasters, environmental degradation and economic uncertainty.

They are also the least secure, with eight of the 15 UN peacekeeping missions operating in LDCs. Over the past decade, least developed countries produced 60 per cent of the world's refugees.

Mr. Ban called for a successful conclusion to the Doha Development Round of multilateral negotiations, saying there was little point in helping LDCs to grow food and other commodities, manufacture products and develop services if they cannot trade fairly in the global marketplace.

**Speaking to reporters** on the sidelines of the conference, Mr. Ban stressed that the gathering must come up with a practical and far-reaching programme of action which will spur LDCs' productive capacity through trade, improved agriculture, financing for development and addressing the consequences of climate change.

"Here in Istanbul, where continents and cultures connect and converge, let us build a strong bridge – a bridge that will enable the least fortunate and most vulnerable members of our human family to cross to the land of prosperity and security," he said.

The President of the General Assembly, Joseph Deiss, described the conference as a unique opportunity to make a real difference for the development of LDCs and called for the renewed and stronger support of the international community.

He said the plan of action that will be agreed in Istanbul "must empower the least developed countries to transform their economies and society by helping to create an enabling national and international environment for social and economic development and enhancing productive capacities."

But Mr. Deiss pointed out the quality of institutions and policies at the national and regional levels must be sound to facilitate development in LDCs.

"Rule of law, respect of human rights and democracy must be strengthened. The fight against corruption has to be intensified," he said.

"Eradicating poverty and reducing vulnerability in the least developed countries is a duty that we have towards the million people living in these countries. This will in turn contribute to making the world safer, more prosperous, more dynamic, more democratic and more united."

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