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## Ban calls for harnessing potential of world's poorest nations



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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today called for harnessing the potential of the world's poorest nations, which may be at the bottom of the development ladder but are rich in resources, both human and material.

Mr. Ban [told](#) participants at the ministerial meeting of the least developed countries (LDCs) that they are meeting at a time of crisis and uncertainty, especially for the world's poorest.

Famine in the Horn of Africa threatens more than 13 million individuals, including a generation of children; drought, desertification and land degradation afflict scores of countries; and diseases ravage the health of people and economies, he noted.

“These are challenges for all countries – but the least developed are also least able to cope in response,” he told the meeting, which was held on the margins of the high-level general debate of the 66th session of the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General said that even though more than half of all people in LDCs live in extreme poverty, these countries should be seen only as weak.

“We should view them as reservoirs of untapped strength,” he said, reiterating a message delivered to the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May. “When we invest in LDCs, we stimulate their development and contribute to global economic growth.

“These countries are rich in resources,” he added. “Not just commodities that deserve a fair price on international markets, but people who deserve opportunities to reach their potential and contribute to society.”

Participants at the Istanbul conference outlined a 10-year plan to support the LDCs overcome poverty, calling on the private sector to play a greater role in the fight, urging wealthy nations to step up their aid commitments and demanding the elimination of many trade barriers.

Calling the Istanbul outcome a “development compact,” Mr. Ban added: “If all partners meet their commitments we can reach our goals.”

The President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, also highlighted the need for a united global partnership to move forward on key issues in support of the LDCs. “We must use the tools at our disposal that privilege inclusion, collaboration and consensus-building. This will ensure that LDCs are heard and their needs are taken into account.”

He told the meeting that the current global financial crisis and the rise in food and fuel prices have accentuated vulnerability in the LDCs. As a result, important domestic programmes aimed at reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and meeting basic needs risk being jeopardized.

Addressing these issues will be a high priority, said Mr. Al-Nasser, adding that he stands ready to support Member States in implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action’s request for the Assembly to establish an ad hoc working group to study and strengthen the smooth transition process for the graduation of LDCs.

He added that it would be worthwhile to consider a thematic debate of the Assembly on issues of priority to the LDCs.

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