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United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this regional consultation on the trade elements of the Doha Programme of Action for LDCs.

We are meeting at a critical time.

The lives and livelihoods of people in LDCs are being severely and disproportionately affected by multiple and overlapping crises COVID-19, climate change, and conflicts, especially the war in Ukraine.

[And] Africa is bearing a heavy brunt of these crises.

International trade has faced severe interruptions.

Trade costs have risen significantly.

Sanctions, export restrictions, inflation, energy costs, volatility in financial markets, and disruptions in value chains and transport they are all having an impact.

Despite the huge disruptions we saw in 2020, international trade started rebounding in 2021. This continued during the first half of last year.

The export of goods from LDCs in 2021 amounted to US\$ 229 billion, representing a 27 per cent increase from 2020.

And it was particularly

The Doha Programme of Action for LDCs for the decade 2022-31 sets an

The Programme reinforces existing global commitments, and agrees on numerous specific goals and targets - as well as new measures and initiatives.

As you would expect, international trade is one of the six fundamental pillars of the Programme.

LDCs can derive significant benefit from a multilateral trading system under the WTO. This should be universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equitable.

Distinguished Colleagues, I want to highlight six key targets and commitments from the Programme of Action which are highly pertinent to African LDCs.

First and foremost: The POA makes specific commitments to fully and expeditiously implement all the decisions of the WTO Ministerial Conferences taken in favour of LDCs. And these include:

duty-free and quota-free market access simplified and transparent rules of origin preferential treatment to services and service suppliers of LDCs and capacity building support. Second: the POA sets an ambitious target to significantly increase the exports of least developed countries, with a view to doubling their share of global exports by 2031.

This is especially important for African countries.

This continent has only about 3 percent of the share of global trade, despite having tremendous resources including oil, diamonds, gold, and a vast array of agricultural products such as coffee, tea, and cocoa.

Just one per cent increase in trade share would generate about \$70 billion of

Fourth

During the pandemic, this sector has seen a major boom.

While the developed countries could turn to digital platforms to continue business during the lockdowns; this was not an option to many businesses in LDCs.

The DPOA urges development partners to provide additional and substantial support in this area.

That includes support for:

building and gaining access to required energy infrastructure; electricity, access to internet, digital infrastructure including Wi-Fi connectivity; Fintech, including mobile banking; and And the good news is-African LDCs are making considerable progress towards graduation in recent years.

We must make it happen.

My Office is fully committed to, and shall invest every effort and resources to translate the goals and targets of the DPOA into concrete actions and deliverables.

We have established a renewed partnership with the WTO, to support the implementation of trade-related goals and targets for the 46 most vulnerable countries.

The MoU between us lays out the specific areas of support to be extended to LDCs in a collaborative manner.

And our joint support measures include:

evidence-based analysis,

joint capacity-building activities

and joint outreach and awareness-raising efforts for trade related technical assistance and capacity building activities.

As part of these joint efforts, WTO and UNOHRLLS, have commissioned a study,

with you. The study offers important perspectives that will help LDCs embark on a journey to promote e-commerce and digital trade.

I shall rest it here.