

Permanent Mission of Eritrea
to the United Nations



ቀዳሚ ልኡክ ኤርትራ ናብ ውድብ ኤቡራት ሃገራት
البعثة الأرترية الدائمة لدى الأمم المتحدة

STATEMENT
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MR. OSMAN SALEH
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE STATE OF ERITREA

AT THE
FOURTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs)

ISTANBUL, TURKEY
11 MAY 2011

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General of the Conference,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to address this historic Istanbul conference, in this great and friendly country of Turkey. Let me extend my deep appreciation to the government and the people of Turkey for the warm reception and generous hospitality extended to my delegation. At the outset, I wish to congratulate you for your election to the Presidency of this milestone conference. Let me also join my colleagues who spoke before me to express my heartfelt gratitude to the High Representative and Secretary-General of the conference, my Brother Cheick Diarra, and his Secretariat; the Chair of the Preparatory Committee, the distinguished Ambassador of Finland and his bureau members. Our special thanks go to Nepal, the Global Chair of the LDCs, for leading a resilient negotiation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

This long awaited conference is about the 48 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that are, day in and day out, struggling to develop and support themselves, my country included. It is indeed a conference of human faces that we know by their names and not of human statistics. Therefore, this conference must succeed to bring a glimpse of hope to the hungry and the sick populations of the LDCs. The success of this conference is a team work venture. It is a covenant partnership between the rich and the poor countries on one hand and the United Nations system on the other.

Mr. President,

This conference is taking place in the aftermath of multiple, inter-related global crises; particularly the increased food insecurity, volatile energy and commodity prices, the financial and economic, and the effects of climate change, over the past years. These crises have severely impacted the LDCs in their hard won progress in the MDGs and in their economic growth.

It has often been said in plain language that there are “No MDGs without the LDCs” which represent over 850 million people. The 2010 Outcome Document of the High-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on the MDGs last September in New York has also expressed grave concern on the slow progress in meeting internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. It highlighted the difficulties the LDCs are facing in several of its paragraphs.

Mr. President,

Despite the implementation of successive programmes of action for the last three decades only few LDCs had substantial achievements to get out of hunger and poverty. Still more than half of their population lives below the poverty line. Forty six years after former Secretary-General U Thant launched the campaign to eradicate hunger from the face of the earth; about 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related illness around the world at the present time. Three-quarter of these are children under the age of five.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are more than 100 million more poor people today than in 1990. Since the establishment of the LDCs category in 1971, only 3 countries have graduated. Mr. President, it is compelling here, therefore, to ask the question “Why”? Why didn’t more countries graduate from the LDCs? Why do we have more poor people today than in the 90s? The answer is clear to my delegation. Our multilateral cooperation has become ineffective. It is indeed broken. We cannot lift the poor countries up by doing business as usual. We cannot expect different results by doing the same thing year in and year out. There has to be a paradigm shift in the way we do development.

In the area of trade, though it is encouraging to note the increase from 0.62% in 2002 to 1.08% in 2008 the share of LDCs in global merchandise trade, the LDCs have yet to achieve the objective of duty-free and quota-free market access for all their exports. It is essential to seriously work towards creating favourable market access conditions for all products originating in LDCs, including through the reduction or elimination of arbitrary or unjustified non-tariff barriers and other trade-distorted measures. At this juncture, I wish to stress that regional and sub-regional cooperation and economic integration regimes should be profoundly enhanced and supported. COMESA, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, is one good example in this regard. In the absence of market access for LDCs goods to countries in the North, due to unfair trade barriers, this kind of regional markets could create opportunities for exchange of goods among countries in the South.

Mr. President,

Given the persistent global financial and economic crisis, the much talked about official development assistance, or ODA, I am afraid to say will either stagnate or decline in the short and medium terms despite the increase we saw to LDCs by the DAC members from \$36.8 million in 2007 to \$46.6 million in 2008. Only 9 donor partners reached the target of 0.15 per cent of GNI in ODA to LDCs.

It is Eritrea’s conviction that cooperation geared more towards trade and investment would be more effective in addressing the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment than ODA that comes with so many red tapes or strings which has over the years failed to assist countries in achieving sustainable development.

In this context, as it is enshrined in the draft Istanbul Program of Action, the ownership, leadership and primary responsibility for their own development should be in the domain of the LDCs. LDCs have the right and responsibility to formulate and execute their own coherent economic and development policies and strategies and identify their own national priorities, including striking a balance in the allocation of resources between economic and social sectors. Eritrea attaches great importance for LDCs to have the necessary policy space, not only in identifying priorities but also in the execution of the priorities set out, to ensure sustainability.

Mr. President,

With a strong will to eliminating hunger and to free its people from handouts, Eritrea has invested hundreds of millions of dollars and enormous human capital on infrastructure for food security. The remarkable harvest of 2010 is a testament to that. Eritrea's strength is its people, who are always willing to sacrifice for the cause of a better life for all Eritreans. Most of the resources, financial or human, used to make the achievements gained so far have been raised domestically. Domestic resource mobilization is the real driver to the success in Eritrea.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I wish to say that we are looking forward, with great anticipation, to the next 10 years, to the implementation of this new Istanbul Programme of Action, or IPoB. Let us make the next decade a turning point for the LDCs. The new Istanbul Programme of Action will determine the development paradigm in the LDCs for years to come. Therefore, let us all join hands to implement the new Programme of Action with renewed commitment for the good of the human family.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your kind attention.