



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

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LDC Commemoration: 50 years of LDCs: Building a New Generation of Partnerships for Progress

Addressing challenges and harnessing potentials through partnerships for sustainable development of
LDCs

Statement by H.E. Dr. Nataša Pirc Musar, President of the Republic of Slovenia

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mme. High Representative and
Secretary-General of the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Back in 1971 when the category of Least Developed Countries was introduced by the UN on the proposal of UNCTAD, I was a two years old toddler living in former Yugoslavia, famed for being a steadfast supporter of developing countries and one of the Non-Aligned founding members. Now, as a first-time politician, I am wondering - what has changed since the early '70s?

It is true that the introduction of the LDC category mobilized developed countries to channel development cooperation and partnerships to the key sectors in LDCs for achieving economic and social development as well as improving human welfare. In this regard, I would like to commend the United Nations for its role in recognizing the particular needs and challenges of the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world. But facts invite us to seriously reflect on where do we go from here.

We must hail successes, such as, for example, that [the infant mortality rate is declining](#). But we also must work hard to do more, sadly all the way towards assuring basic needs for human beings, to preserve at least a shred of their dignity. For me, as a mother and human rights defender, it is unacceptable that, [according to the WHO](#), two billion people still lack basic sanitation, and one-third of them live in the Least Developed Countries.

Excellences,

Science and technology can provide key solutions across all areas of sustainable development.

Technology transfer and sharing of knowledge is the way to go. We must promote local innovations, research, and development. We must listen to specialized agencies that see advancing digital connectivity as one of the targets for empowering LDCs. [A recent study](#) emphasized that many people in the world's poorest countries are unable to reap the benefits of life-changing technologies. It shows, for example, that 76 percent of the population living in the Least Developed Countries is covered by a mobile broadband signal, yet only 25 percent of them are online. I am confident that in 10 years, most likely even less, this picture will be dramatically different. But we need to get ready for this now and ask ourselves the 'day after' question. What is next for the LDCs population after everybody is online?

We need to make sure that 'the day after' is a success story. I have faith in science and technology, but I always say that science is closely connected with ethics. The use of AI, for example, is ethical only as much as the person who uses it, is ethical.

Technological advances and inventions can also slow down, stop, or even reverse social development, especially in vulnerable societies. The use of technology in forms such as ChatGPT is just the beginning of an era in human history that we can't quite imagine yet. As someone said, "it's like the invention of the internet browser back 20-30 years ago. It's that sort of quantum leap." Here social media offer us an illustrative example. They provide access to information, but they can also mislead and generate hatred and intolerance. Disinformation has ruined many lives and led to many deaths, also in the least developed countries. I cannot imagine sustainable development goals being pursued without close attention to opportunities and threats that social media bring with them.

Partnerships in the digital era will be important to sustain both economic and political stability around the world. I firmly stand by the Doha Plan of Action and its call for an increase of financing from all sources to least-developed countries to support the development of domestic digital, data, and artificial intelligence infrastructure. At the same time, we must establish a political environment that will be vigilant and maintain a critical discourse when reflecting on risks brought by scientific and technological achievements.

The EU does pioneering work in this regard. It adopts legislation that is copied all around the world. But this isn't enough. Working with the youth in particular will be of crucial importance. Partnership with teachers at all levels of education will be indispensable. Civil society, private sector, and NGOs must be involved, too. Inclusiveness and transparency are the key to avoiding the misuse of modern technological achievements.

Excellences,

I am fully aware that we cannot address challenges and make good use of potentials through partnerships for sustainable development of LDCs if we are not able to deal with current global crises in a world of deepening inequalities.

LDCs must be empowered to deal with global problems. Empowerment is closely connected with the needed reform of the international financial system. It should not further penalize those most disadvantaged with an accumulation of debts and exorbitant interest rates. It will entail the transfer of technology and know-how in critical social areas, such as development, public goods, and climate action. In other words, I fully agree that we need to focus on today's priorities related to the perils of

underdevelopment and climate change. At the same time, I venture to say that it is the responsibility of us leaders and opinion-makers to be prepared not only for the present but also for the future.

Twenty years ago, I would have probably concluded this address by saying, I know this is a tall order to ask for such action. Today, times are different. We definitely need to act **now**. The Doha Plan of Action sets ambitious targets and commitments for the forthcoming decade, and, most importantly, sends a strong message. We cannot be satisfied with formal commitments, we need to deliver. The developed world must take its fair share of the burden. I am certain that deliberations at the conference will prove useful in transforming the commitments into action, also by forming new partnerships for the future and in this way, materialize our joint responsibility for least developed countries and the entire humanity.

Thank you for your attention.