

Statement by Ambassador Bagher Asadi, Chairman of the Group of 77 (Islamic Republic of Iran) at the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Brussels, 15 May 2001

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour for the Chairman of the Group of 77 to have the opportunity to address the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, particularly in this historic, beautiful city and more so at the headquarters of the European collective legislature. Allow me, at the very outset, to offer, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, our most sincere felicitations to you, Mr. Chairman, and the other distinguished members of the Bureau on your meritorious election to this high office and wish all of you every success in discharge of the daunting responsibility you have undertaken. Our deep gratitude and appreciation also go to the European Union, and the Government and People of Belgium, for hosting this Conference. Special thanks are also due Ambassador Jacques Scavee, the honourable Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, for all his excellent work in steering the process from the very beginning up to this advanced stage of the Conference. I will be found remiss should I fail to pay our tribute to UNCTAD, the institution, its Secretariat and the person of Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero, for all their invaluable support to the cause, the process and the Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

The very *raison d'être* of the Group of 77 – the only universal intergovernmental deliberative body of the South – lies in its unwavering pursuit of genuine interests and concerns of the developing world through active and constructive participation in multilateral processes and negotiations towards achieving a more equitable and humane world economic system. Today, at the very beginning of the last stage of serious negotiation on the content of the Programme of Action, I would like to reiterate, once again, our solidarity with the least developed countries, an inseparable and important part and parcel of our developing community.

“The collective responsibility to uphold the principle of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level” as enunciated by the Millennium Declaration and its undertaking to “free the entire human race from want” and also to “create an environment, at the national and global levels, conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty” are indeed welcome pronouncements to billions of people around the globe. They await, however, to be translated into action and become part of the everyday reality in the bigger part of the human community in general, and in the least developed countries in particular.

Quite a sobering picture was depicted yesterday, by men and women of high office and international stature and renown, both from the developed, prosperous North and the developing or non-developing South, of the very grim reality of underdevelopment and its attendant poverty, suffering, insecurity and destitution. Many great, sweet words were uttered and an equally tall and elaborate catalogue of promises were also presented. It was certainly reassuring to hear, from speaker after speaker, that the time has come for the international community to seize the moment of opportunity – indeed a historical, propitious one – to make the conference an occasion for commitment for action and determination to deliver. It is a welcome development that the high officials attending the opening ceremony of this universal intergovernmental process emphasized, one after another, that there should not be another missed opportunity.

Mr. Chairman,

The grim reality of life in the least developed community points to the enormity of their challenges. It is a widely shared belief, however, that opportunities, both actual and potential, for them are equally tremendous, even greater. What is needed is the requisite political will on the part of the haves of the world, and their institutions and agencies, to take it upon themselves to move beyond the half-hearted responses of the past, arrive at a new conscientious awareness and resolve, and allocate and mobilize the necessary resources for a strategic new partnership. A partnership that is premised on achieving development and bridging morally unacceptable and politically untenable, even frighteningly dangerous, differences and gaps. We also share the notion on the desirability, even inevitability, of good governance, transparency and accountability. We, however, underline their relevance and necessity both at the national and international levels, and consider them to be mutually supportive and reinforcing.

It is a fact that many least developed countries have undertaken far-reaching reforms in their respective societies despite acute problems such as growing marginalization, declining ODA flows, inadequate FDI inflows, unfavourable market access conditions and limited productive capacities. And moreover, it should be acknowledged that there have in fact been some very positive developments in many LDCs in the areas of transparent and accountable governance and socio-economic reforms. The new partnership should help sustain and further consolidate these gains and successes and help make it possible in others. The Conference should, therefore, go beyond repackaging of old commitments and come up with concrete measures, especially in the critical areas of trade, finance, investment and debt. Meaningful departure from the previous lukewarm approaches and policies is imperative to provide the LDCs with the opportunity to bring the current trends to an effective halt and hopefully to reverse the situation. It is somehow heartening that the Third Conference on LDCs is taking place at the time when general prosperity on a global scale has registered phenomenal expansion and also that global progress is possible.

As for the role of the developing world, we in the Group of 77 stand ready to advance the objectives of the Conference with a view to accelerating growth and development and eradication of poverty in the LDCs. We pledge, within the framework of South-South co-operation, to work in partnership with all the stakeholders to make globalisation - whose potential benefits are yet to be realised for the bigger part of the human community - work for LDCs, inter alia, through supporting LDCs efforts to build the requisite productive, human and institutional capacities. It should be clear, though, that this partnership and co-operation which needs to be supported by the international community should not be viewed as a substitute for but rather as a complement to North-South co-operation. It hardly needs to be re-emphasized that the commitments under the Programme of Action call for new resources, over and above what is already available and on the table. This will be the litmus test of it all. It is within this framework that we call on the developed community as well as the United Nations system and the other multilateral organizations to undertake what is needed to live up to their commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

We all need to take stock of the past experiences with honesty and objectivity, and take it upon ourselves to build a solid foundation for future, without illusion or unrealism - albeit with vision and determination. In doing so, a critical hindsight is an absolute necessity. Over 30 years ago the United Nations recognized the plight of least developed countries as a special case, because they were desperately poor, economically in critical conditions and structurally handicapped in the development process and therefore needed the highest degree of support from the international community. Despite important measures undertaken since then, not only their plight has deepened, but also their number has increased - much to the dismay of us all. Addition of a new entrant into the LDCs rank just on the eve of this Conference cannot but point to the rather sad conclusion that the international community has, in its entirety, been far less supportive of LDCs in many areas foreseen in the Programs of Action.

The Third UN Conference on LDCs is poised between the experiences of the past, concerns of the present

and the hopes and expectations of a yet uncharted future. It is set to start, as of this very morning, to proceed with the negotiations on the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010. The Programme of Action contains a wide range of measures and actions in various areas, which, in our view, are modest and achievable. But, as we are fully aware, the problem has not been due to lack of adopted measures and decisions, rather active follow-up and implementation of the agreed decisions and measures.

Mr. Chairman,

In the few remaining days we should commit ourselves, both developed and developing, and of course, the LDC community, to agree on a sharply focused action-oriented Programme of Action, and arrive at a set of practical and deliverable measures. The thrust of the final outcome of this Conference should be to lay the foundation for a more effective system of international development co-operation. The outcome should nevertheless be visionary and aim at the long-term, cognizant of the fact that the costs of failure might simply be too high for the entire existing order to afford. Let us resolve not to allow the moment of opportunity perish or come to naught. Let us resolve not to be found wanting in this collective enterprise.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.