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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC
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**ON AGENDA ITEM 3 ON “SPECIAL BODY OF LEAST
DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES AND PACIFIC ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES”**

**DURING THE 78TH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)**

**25 MAY 2022
14:00 – 16:00 HOURS**

**UN CONFERENCE CENTRE – ESCAP HALL
BANGKOK, THAILAND**

Please check against delivery.

- **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP;**
- **Excellencies, Honourable Ministers;**
- **Distinguished Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. I am elated to participate in-person in this session, that addresses the development challenges that are specific to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), collectively known as **countries in special situations** or **with special needs**.
2. In my dual capacity as President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Chair of the Group of LLDCs, I fully support all initiatives aimed at addressing the special needs of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

3. ECOSOC -- as the UN Principal Organ dedicated to development matters -- continues to play an instrumental role in policy discussions concerning countries in special situations.
4. The Council is actively involved in preparations for the **Fifth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries in 2023**, the **Third Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries in 2024** and the **Fourth Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024**, which will all review the Programmes of Actions for these groups of countries and launch successor programmes that reflect the current realities.
5. I am, therefore, pleased that you have included this agenda item as part of your discussions at this 78th Session.
6. It is an important matter that affects the 37 Member States of ESCAP that are classified as LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

7. The United Nations first recognized LDCs as a distinct group in 1971. Due to the high numbers of African countries in the LDC category, representing 33 out of the 46 LDCs (roughly 72%), the LDC Agenda is often viewed as an African Agenda.
8. In this respect, I applaud ESCAP for providing a background document for this session entitled **“Summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2022: Financing a Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19 and Beyond,”** which highlights the acute needs of countries in special situations and calls for strengthened international cooperation and global solidarity to support inclusive and sustainable recovery in these countries.
9. As you are aware, countries in special situations were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as they lack resilience against pandemics and disasters.

10. As we embark on economic recovery and build back better, it is concerning that many of the countries in special situations are experiencing the slowest growth rates.
11. To worsen matters, these countries continue to face mounting social, economic and political pressures. Their development prospects look bleak as evidenced by shrinking fiscal space and heightened debt burden that undermine their recovery efforts and limit their ability to invest in key drivers of development and innovation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. The worsening climate crisis, disasters and the current geopolitical tensions have exacerbated development challenges for countries with special needs, making their chance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals further out of reach.

13. It is sad to say that the Goals were unattainable for many of these countries, even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
14. It is also unfortunate that over the course of six decades, only three African countries were able to graduate from the LDC special status, namely Botswana, Cabo Verde and Equatorial Guinea. Outside Africa, other countries that graduated are the Maldives, Samoa and Vanuatu.
15. To address the special needs of these countries, it is more urgent than ever to scale up financing and investment to support these countries to overcome the adverse impacts of the crises and re-launch them back onto a sustainable development path.
16. We already have in place comprehensive blueprints, such as the **2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063** in the case of Africa, the **Doha Programme of Action, Vienna Programme of Action** and the **SAMOA Pathway** to guide us to achieve sustainable development.

17. With strengthened international cooperation, and strategic national, regional and global partnerships we can overcome the development challenges facing countries in special situations.
18. To contribute to the ongoing search for viable options, I wish to highlight a few areas where international cooperation can provide the utmost support to these countries.
19. In line with one of my priorities as President of ECOSOC, it is crucial that concerted efforts should be made to ensure equitable access to the life-saving vaccines. Addressing vaccine inequity is critical to ensuring a quicker and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
20. Second, the international community needs to better support countries with special needs to build adequate fiscal space -- not only by financing the most immediate COVID-19 response and recovery efforts but also to boost long-term investment in critical

socio-economic infrastructure and addressing climate and environmental challenges.

21. There is an urgent need to halt and reverse the growing trend of deep cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) to countries with special needs.
22. Developed countries should honour their ODA commitments, and also increase their share of grants and concessional loans to these countries, which are currently declining.
23. It is also critical to address the debt distress and widening fiscal deficits facing the countries in special situations.
24. To support climate actions, development partners should honour their climate finance commitments and set more ambitious targets to scale up finance in this critical area. More funding is required to address the adverse impacts of climate change in countries in special situations.

25. Countries in special situations should be supported to leverage new sources of financing. Innovative financing instruments remain largely untapped in countries with special needs, and there are ample opportunities to mobilize additional resources for sustainable development.
26. Countries with special needs require technical and institutional capacity, including conducive legal and regulatory policies, knowledge exchange, and technology transfer to unlock opportunities for domestic resource mobilization.

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

27. As I conclude, I urge all of you to seize this occasion to renew our efforts to galvanize support to countries with special needs to the greatest extent possible -- by placing them at the core of our recovery efforts, and fulfilling our ambition to build a better future for all.

28. **I thank you for your kind attention.**

