

The LDC Civil Society Forum Istanbul Declaration 13 May 2011

1. We, representatives of civil society organisations, who have met here in Istanbul on 7-13 May 2011 at the Civil Society Forum of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the LDCs, have very much appreciated the opportunities throughout this process to express our views on the challenges to LDCs and the development of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Istanbul Political Declaration.

2. However, it is with deep disappointment that, at the conclusion of this process, it is clear our voices have not been heard and reflected in the conference outcomes. The negotiations started with analyses of the failings of the Brussels Programme of Action, also reflected in UNCTAD's LDC report 2010. These showed that development partners failed to deliver their commitments to provide adequate aid, reform unjust trade rules, remove the burden of debt and build the capacity of LDCs.

3. More importantly, various analyses also pointed to flaws and shortcomings of the model of development promoted by dominant players in the international community. Export-led growth has been inequitable and unsustainable, resulting in LDC commodity dependency, de-industrialization, environmental damage and socio-economic marginalization. These failures and the flawed paradigm have contributed to the growth in LDCs from 24 to 48, and graduation of only three LDCs over the last three decades. More than half the women and men in LDCs still live in abject poverty. There is widespread violation of human rights. Social justice and peace have remained a dream.

4. From the beginning we stated clearly that this is unacceptable. The development paradigm must be changed. Our calls echoed proposals for a New International Support Architecture, and gone further in calling for a more fundamental transformation of the relations between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, men and women, the elites and those without resources, the dominant and the marginalised. We have urged for this conference to mark a turning point towards a more just, more equitable and more sustainable world. We are deeply disappointed that the Istanbul Programme of Action has failed to meet these challenges.

5. We strongly believe that it is important to base development on LDCs' strengths and not on their weaknesses. Countries may be categorized as 'poor' according to UN criteria, but they are rich in many important aspects – in community cohesion, in natural resources and being able to live in harmony with our natural world, in diverse cultures and in human dignity. And especially in the growing numbers of young women and men who have huge potential and hopes for a better future. In many ways, our societies are the most developed countries, not the least developed.

6. But the LDCs are economically disadvantaged, exploited and marginalised. As part of the preparation for this conference, civil society engaged in an extensive process of listening to the concerns of the people in the LDCs through local, national and regional consultations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. These highlighted the greater burdens that the marginalized and vulnerable peoples of LDCs have had to face in the last decade, with new crises of food, water and energy, the impacts of the financial crisis, and the intensification of the climate crisis. There is deep fear over an uncertain future even as there is determination to survive.

7. The conference has failed to meet our expectations and the UN General Assembly mandate. The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/63/227 calls on governments "to mobilize additional international support measures and action in favour of the least developed countries, and, in this regard, to formulate and adopt a renewed partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners". This has not happened. Civil society is frustrated that, having caused massive costs in the LDCs through financial and food speculation, unjust trade rules, illegitimate loans with onerous conditionality, and ecological damage, including climate change, the developed countries have not even committed to provide more aid to LDCs. Even worse, many donors are either reducing their aid or diverting it to pay for climate change damage, despite their commitments in UNFCCC negotiations to provide new and additional funding for climate finance. Current levels of aid are dwarfed by the mounting costs of the damage done to LDC economies and their people.

8. We recognise the strong efforts of LDC governments and the Turkish government to develop tangible commitments in the Programme of Action, but the UNGA resolution's call for a renewed partnership has been undermined by the developed countries systematically having removed any targets, timetables and delivery mechanisms that may have been used to hold them to account. They have refused to accept commitments beyond those already agreed in other forums like the Millennium Summit, WTO and climate change negotiations. And they have used these negotiations to try to drive divisions between developing countries by calling for some developing countries to accept the same obligations as developed countries. South-south cooperation will be crucially important for the future of LDCs, but developing countries need to contribute according to their common aims but differentiated responsibilities. Support for LDCs from the south should complement but not substitute for the agreed obligations of developed

countries.

9. We welcome the attention paid to enhancing productive capacity in the Programme of Action. This is crucial to create jobs for the growing numbers of young people through inclusive policies that capture more value from resources, diversify the economy and build on the strengths of LDCs. We also welcome the recognition that governments need to lead the development process, not donors or the private sector, and we welcome the establishment of a technology bank.

10. But the approach adopted in the Programme of Action relies heavily on economic liberalisation repackaged in new ways. Market-led approaches have been replaced by private sector-led approaches. The Programme of Action calls for the removal of impediments to the private sector, without recognition that governments need to regulate to protect workers, consumers, the environment and local communities. Civil society accepts that the private sector can play a useful role, but our experience is of companies that have unsustainably exploited minerals, fish and forests; land grabs that have stolen the resources and livelihoods of local people; biofuel plantations that have destroyed forests and agricultural lands; food dumping that has destroyed farmers' livelihoods; and projects that leave local people with no water and a polluted environment. Intellectuals meeting here have reminded us that the LDCs must not remain the MECs – the most exploited countries.

11. In a number of areas, the Programme of Action calls for public finance to be given to the private sector in the forms of guarantees, investment promotion schemes and incentives. But these subsidies hand over public money to the private sector in the hope that the market will deliver public benefits. International experience with public private partnerships demonstrates the need to avoid the public sector paying for the costs while the companies reap the profits. Funds needed to overcome poverty and injustice, including education, health care, water and sanitation, gender equity, social inclusion and community development are being diverted to subsidise companies. There is grossly insufficient funding now to meet the needs of the resource poor, without more being diverted from donors and governments to companies. Expropriation of the public purse is unacceptable.

12. We are calling for the Istanbul consensus to constitute a clear rejection of the Washington consensus. Government policy should be based on participative national development strategies that focus on each country's vision and core strengths. We must build jobs and opportunities for the sustainable use of our oil, our mineral wealth, our land, our forests, our fish and other natural resources, protecting the rights of traditional owners and users of the resources, adding value and insisting on fair prices. Diversification of our economies will require

government leadership to build a strong domestic economy, with particular emphasis on creating opportunities for cooperatives and social enterprises, small and medium companies and women-led organisations. The rights of vulnerable and marginalised people must be put at the centre of economic decision-making, with stronger mechanisms for transparency, integrity and accountability.

13. In particular, LDCs should pursue an environmentally sustainable and equitable growth strategy that is labour intensive, that provides decent work opportunities to a wider range of people especially the large numbers of young women and men, coupled with opportunities to gain new skills and improve their livelihoods. LDC governments should uphold and guarantee core labour rights, including freedom of association, and prepare national plans for the implementation of the ILO Global Jobs Pact with the meaningful participation of social partners and representative civil society organisations.

14. Export-led growth was an important component of LDCs' development strategies in the Brussels Programme of Action, but LDCs still account for only around 1% of world exports. A decade ago, there were expectations that trade reform would be possible as part of a Doha Development Agenda. But 'development' has been erased from the agenda, and negotiations are stuck because of the unwillingness of developed countries to agree to reform the major trade distortions in the system, notably due to inequitable rules on agriculture. Civil society is calling for an end to unjust trade agreements and for LDCs to resist efforts by developed countries to negotiate reciprocal trade agreements. Special and Differential Treatment and policy flexibility for LDCs need to be made operational according to a given country's stage of development (rather than limiting it by time) within the WTO and regional and bilateral agreements, so that LDCs can adopt development strategies that reflect their specific needs and opportunities.

15. We call for the promotion of economically viable, socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable farming practices so that food sovereignty of LDC people is strengthened. Agricultural research that builds on seed diversity and socio-cultural farming practices needs to be supported and new and additional financial resources must be mobilised to support adaptation and strengthened resilience to climate change-related impacts. Agrarian reform policies must support the needs, strengths and rights of smallholder farmers, particularly women, and support them to organise into producer associations or cooperatives and to add value to their indigenous production systems.

16. We urge governments of LDCs to promote and implement women's rights and gender equality, and to guarantee in their development strategies the enjoyment by women of their

rights, as stated in domestic laws and international and regionally-agreed standards. Governments must ensure the effective participation of women in the formulation of policies and decisions, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of strategies aimed at the realization of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

17. All countries need to respect the human rights of migrants, migrant workers, their children and their other dependants. The right to “movement with dignity” must be ensured. An effective regulatory mechanism must be set up to prevent sexual exploitation and forced labour, particularly for women and children who are highly vulnerable to these deprivations. Countries must provide access to basic services and amenities and ensure effective social security systems for migrant workers. International efforts to combat ongoing incidences of human trafficking must be stepped up with provisions of severe penalties for people who engage in the trafficking of human beings.

18. Public investment in human development must not be sidelined in implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Education is crucial for citizens of LDCs to be able to participate fully in economic, social and political life. But formal education levels remain low in most LDCs. Although many LDCs are making progress towards the MDG targets for primary education, this has not translated into opportunities for continuing education at the secondary and tertiary level. This is essential if young women and men are to have the skills to participate as citizens and as skilled contributors to LDC economies.

19. Similarly, the need to strengthen health systems and infrastructure and to ensure functional health systems at all levels is critical to achieving the health related goals of the MDGs. Governments need to allocate sufficient resources to provide the infrastructure, salaries, human resources and training for education, and increase public health expenditure.

20. We call for governments and donors to give a new priority to water and sanitation for all by 2020, and to the global Sanitation and Water for All partnership as a global platform to deliver national commitments on sanitation and water. The urban poor are particularly neglected. Service delivery plans must meet the growing needs for water and sanitation in cities and towns. The problem is not one of water scarcity but of political will. Government needs to develop mechanisms for social protection to be available to all citizens, greater accountability for the delivery of all essential services and the adoption of a rights-based approach. Civil society rejects the privatisation of essential services under the guise of public private partnerships or otherwise.

21. We call for immediate and unconditional cancellation of all debts of LDCs and a moratorium on debt payments by LDC governments pending debt cancellation. An international process with counterpart national processes should be established, aimed at a rigorous study of illegitimate debt, including case studies, in order to come up with policies that lead to full and unconditional debt cancellation and changes in lending and borrowing policies and practices. Immediate changes must be pursued in the practices of lending and borrowing to move towards sovereign, democratic and responsible financing.

22. Industrialised countries must commit to deep, drastic, unconditional cuts in carbon and GHG emissions through domestic measures, to be expressed in international, legally binding agreements within the Climate Convention that contain targets based on science and equity. The pursuit of false solutions must cease. They also need to commit to obligatory, predictable, condition-free, additional, non-debt creating public finance to cover the full costs of adaptation in countries of the South, as well as the costs of shifting to sustainable systems – to be part of international legally binding agreements within the Climate Convention. Action is urgent to avoid catastrophic climate change. The Istanbul target to reduce the numbers of LDCs needs to occur because they graduate not because they burn or drown due the impacts of climate change.

23. We call for more and better ODA which must be directed towards development effectiveness rather than the dominant aid effectiveness approach. ODA must respect sovereignty and support people-owned policies and programmes, rather being undermined by conditionality. Adequate and predictable sources of finance are needed, such as from a Financial Transactions Tax levied on the transactions of the major banks and financial institutions.

24. Civil society must be given a stronger role as a partner in development. Real ownership by LDCs of their development strategies requires not only ownership by governments but by society as a whole. States need to have the political space to decide on their own development, and strategies need to be discussed democratically, approved and monitored. In that regard, the primary accountability of governments should be to their own societies and parliaments, not to donors, investors or international agencies like the World Bank, IMF or WTO. Civil society should play a key role in supporting public participation and should be included as a core partner in all decision making processes. And governments should create space for civil society to have an independent voice.

25. An effective follow-up strategy to the UN-LDC IV Conference needs to be created, implemented and monitored. We call for regular reviews of progress to renew commitments and generate political will. The mechanisms should not only rely on UN processes but include civil

society, the private sector and other actors. There must be opportunities for objective assessments of progress, including the submission of reports by civil society, and mechanisms to hold governments, including both LDCs and development partners, to account for their role in fulfilling the aims of the Istanbul Declaration.

26. The participants in the Civil Society Forum have raised their voices and expressed their hopes for the future. They have expressed the need for immediate and effective follow-up to ensure results and delivery on the commitments made in the Istanbul Programme of Action. The remarkable amount of active participation on the part of Civil Society, and their commitment to continue working together for various issues long after the conference, demonstrates their interest and ability to influence change.

27. We will continue our work over the forthcoming decade. We will educate and raise awareness about the crucial challenges facing LDCs and the need for people-centred approaches to development. We will support and mobilise local communities and other citizens to challenge unjust and unsustainable policies and practices. We will play our part in ending the injustice of poverty and suffering. We will continue to work collaboratively with those who share our aims.

28. We conclude by expressing our thanks for the great contributions from our fellow participants here in Istanbul; the Civil Society Steering Committee; Cheick Sidi Diarra, the Secretary-General of this conference, and the staff of UNOHRRLLS; Doctors Worldwide, host of the Civil Society Forum; LDC Watch, the Government of Turkey and the people of this lovely city of Istanbul; and the Chair and members of the LDC Global Coordination Bureau.