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**MESSAGE FROM THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF UNCTAD**



The first year of the new century saw UNCTAD involved in two major events which will have repercussions in the near future. These were the tenth session of UNCTAD (UNCTAD X), which took place in Bangkok in February 2000, and the preparations for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC III), which was to be held in Brussels in May 2001.

It is no exaggeration to say that UNCTAD X marked a turning point in international discussions on development. The prospects and implications arising out of the present trend towards globalization, and the anxieties which it arouses, pervaded the deliberations of UNCTAD X and were reflected in the Programme of Action which it adopted. Most importantly, UNCTAD X saw the beginning of a new convergence of views which stresses the importance of the social dimension in the process of globalization and the need to ensure that this process is an inclusive phenomenon that can benefit the developing countries, particularly the poorest ones.

This remark leads me straight to the critical issue dealt with by LDC III in Brussels. The

least developed countries (LDCs) are facing the greatest challenge of our times: to eradicate poverty through sustained development. Radical policy reforms and strong international support will be indispensable for achieving this goal. Unfortunately, the progress made in the last two decades does not inspire optimism. Now more than ever we need concrete and action-oriented solutions. It is with these objectives in mind that we prepared for the Conference. We submitted a draft Programme of Action for discussion and negotiation at the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee, held in July 2000. This report describes the most important features of the preparations made for the Conference during the year 2000.

This report also highlights the activities of UNCTAD as a knowledge-based institution and as a member of the UN family. In this context, UNCTAD puts forward for discussion new ideas and approaches to help developing countries to integrate more securely into the world economy. This type of work is an indispensable complement to consensus-building and international negotiations, and I am pleased to note that both member States and civil society welcome our activities in that connection.

In addition, the present report takes stock of the activities we carried out during the previous year. It does not purport to give a comprehensive account of the full range of activities, but rather to indicate where we are heading in the fulfilment of our mandate. Therefore, the relative weights given to the different activities described here reflect the way in which UNCTAD is mobilizing its limited resources to deal with the challenges faced by the international economy in the period ahead. In this sense, the report, while essentially retrospective, has an implicit forward-looking content which I hope will engage the attention of its readers.

Chapter I

MAJOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL EVENTS



A. UNCTAD X

UNCTAD X was the first major international economic gathering of the new millennium. Held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12 to 19 February, it was marked by its forceful plea for help for those at risk of being marginalized by the global economy. The eight-day Conference brought together some 3,000 ministers and senior government officials from UNCTAD's member States, along with representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other segments of civil society, including academia and the private sector.

Delegations from 159 of the 190 member States, 106 of them led by ministers and 16 by Heads of State or Government from developing countries, attended the Conference. It was presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister of Thailand, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, who will become Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2002.

The theme of the Conference was "Applying the lessons of the past to make globalization an effective instrument for the development of all countries and of all people". It examined policies and institutional frameworks that have shaped the development process, in order to draft strategies and policies that would forge a new consensus among developed and developing countries about the necessary tools for development.

There was general recognition that although globalization has indeed generated both opportunities and challenges, its impact has been mixed, and some low-income countries risk exclusion from the global economic system. In Bangkok, many developing country representatives referred repeatedly to the difficulties of managing the process of development in a rapidly globalizing and changing international economic environment. They noted that liberalization and globalization have increased uncertainty in the world economy and are undermining social cohesion, traditional values and cultural diversity. This makes it all the more urgent to develop a transparent decision-making process in all international institutions and to include developing countries in it. A rules-based, equitable and predictable multilateral trading system is also needed.

There was also widespread recognition of the need to go beyond, and indeed to depart from, conventional approaches to economic and social issues. Delegates called for a rethinking of development strategy in the context of globalization and for a review of the principles governing international cooperation. For globalization to be better managed, a new global order is needed in order to correct the effects of market failures and to minimize the dangers of marginalization of weaker economies. To achieve this goal, it is important to balance competing interests and to avoid ideologically based agendas.

Conference events

In addition to the intergovernmental deliberations, the various interactive debates, academic events and events involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs),

UNCTAD X hosted a range of other meetings and parallel events. These included:

- A parliamentary meeting organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), with support from the UNCTAD secretariat, on 10 and 11 February. The 130 legislators from 53 countries issued a declaration on the issues at stake at the Conference.
- A high-level round table with heads of United Nations agencies, programmes and related institutions on 12 February. It was designed as a contribution to the Millennium UN General Assembly and as a step towards greater coherence among United Nations bodies dealing with economic issues.
- A meeting on foreign direct investment (FDI) promotion in Africa on 15 February, organized by the UNCTAD secretariat and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). Contrary to the general perception of the investment climate in Africa, panellists called for a more nuanced approach, based on an UNCTAD/ICC survey revealing successful investment ventures and policy frameworks in a range of African countries.
- Interactive debates with heads of international organizations before the plenary sessions, from 13 to 16 February. The keynote speakers were: Mr. Michel Camdessus, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund; Mr. Enrique Iglesias, President, Inter-American Development Bank; Mr. Mike Moore, Director-General, World Trade Organization; Mr. Juan Somavia, Director-General, International Labour Organization; and Mr. James Wolfensohn, President, World Bank. The debates focused on institutional responses to the challenges of globalization.
- A meeting of LDC trade ministers on 13 February. The ministers addressed the shortcomings of the external economic environment and the constraints it poses for the development efforts of developing countries, and LDCs in particular.
- A round table with the heads of the UN regional commissions on 14 February, which examined the development experiences of various regional economic arrangements in developing countries and transition economies.
- The presentation on 16 February of a joint Global Programme on Globalization, Liberalization and Sustainable Human Development by the UNCTAD secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on which they collaborated with the UN regional commissions and other international organizations. Launched in 1998, the programme aims at enhancing the capacities of developing countries to manage their integration into the global economy in a way that achieves high and sustainable growth, creating employment and eradicating poverty, while minimizing the risks of instability and marginalization.
- A round table with a group of entrepreneurs from developing countries and economies in transition on 18 February. Adding first-hand accounts of their experiences, the panellists spoke about the “human dimension of development”, giving their views on what types of government intervention hamper entrepreneurship and which “empower” individual economic initiatives.
- A Leaders’ Forum on 19 February with Heads or Deputy Heads of State or Government. Represented were Thailand, together with the Governments of Algeria, the Dominican Republic, Morocco, Mozambique, Peru, South Africa and Uganda. These political leaders shared their experiences and reflections regarding globalization and development, and

regarding ways to prevent further marginalization of developing countries from the global economy.

Fifth WAIPA Conference

UNCTAD, in collaboration with the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) and the Board of Investment of Thailand, organized the fifth WAIPA annual conference during UNCTAD X. WAIPA, which is the largest global forum for the exchange of best practices and networking among investment promotion professionals, helps its members to improve their work and to expand their networks with other institutions and international businesses. UNCTAD has hosted the WAIPA secretariat since the organization's inception in 1995.

UNCTAD presented its publication *Best Practices in Investment Promotion: Survey of Investment Promotion Agencies 2000*. The results of the survey will provide investment promotion agencies (IPAs) with a tool for improving their services to investors, increasing the transparency of the investment process and enhancing the contribution of FDI to sustainable development.

UNCTAD's Plan of Action and the Bangkok Declaration

Intense negotiations resulted in a consensus on many of the most controversial economic and development issues on the world agenda. Intergovernmental deliberations in plenary session and in committees led to the adoption of the Plan of Action, which harmonized UNCTAD's mandate with the new global economy and with the challenges that arise from it. The Conference also adopted the Bangkok Declaration (see annex IV).

The Plan of Action recognizes that developing countries face imbalances and asymmetries in

the international trading system, which must be urgently addressed with the support of the UNCTAD secretariat. It also gives UNCTAD a stronger mandate to contribute to reform of the international financial system in the light of its highly regarded analysis of the East Asian crisis.

The Bangkok Declaration reaffirms UNCTAD as "the focal point within the United Nations for the integrated treatment of development and the interrelated issues in the areas of trade, finance, investment, technology, and sustainable development". It states that UNCTAD's work helps "address the challenges and opportunities of globalization and inform an open and systematic debate on development-related issues of global interest among partners in the development process, including the private sector, NGOs, academia and parliamentarians. It should pursue this open dialogue to help shape international economic relations in the twenty-first century."

B. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries



Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee

The Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Conference held three sessions, the first in July 2000, when it agreed the draft provisional agenda to be adopted by the Conference as well as its draft rules of procedure.

Expert-level preparatory meetings

The Conference secretariat organized expert-level preparatory meetings in Addis Ababa,

Kathmandu and Niamey during 2000, hosted by the respective Governments. They were organized in close collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The meetings looked at financing growth, development, trade, market access and supply capacity, as well as good governance, stability, integrated national development and social services delivery in LDCs.

High-level panel on the assessment of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s

As Secretary-General of the Conference Mr. Ricupero established this panel, which held three meetings during 2000. Its mandate was to assess the most critical obstacles to the effective realization of the goals of the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s. The panel suggested new strategies to enable LDCs to follow a sustained development path.

Second and third inter-agency consultations on the preparatory process for the Conference

Given the important role of the relevant international organizations in the preparations for the Conference, inter-agency consultations

were held to review their contribution to the process and to prepare proposals on the basis of themes/sectoral topics suggested by the Conference secretariat. The first consultations were held in 1999, with subsequent ones in April and July 2000.

Advocacy and promotion of the Conference

In close cooperation with the UN Department of Public Information, the Conference secretariat drew up a communication strategy for the Conference. It focused on, in the LDCs, increasing awareness, mobilizing grass-roots involvement and building confidence; and, in donor countries, on increasing public awareness and substantive knowledge of the issues while mobilizing greater political support and resources for action.

Special meeting of ministers of the LDCs

The special meeting, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, was convened on 14 April 2000 in Havana at the G-77 South Summit. The ministers recommended convening a ministerial-level meeting prior to the Conference to exchange views and coordinate the position of their countries on issues for the Conference. The ministers sought the assistance of the Secretary-General of the Conference for the organizational and substantive aspects of their meeting.

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