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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE STATE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam
Permanent Representative of the State of Eritrea to the United Nations
At the 5th United Conference on the Least Developed Countries
Doha, Qatar
5-9 March 2023**

**Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, on behalf of the Government of the State of Eritrea, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the United Nations for organizing the 5th Conference of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and would like to extend my appreciation to the State of Qatar for hosting this important event and warmly welcoming us in this beautiful city of Doha.

Mr. President,

This year's Conference is of special significance as it is being held at a time when the global economy is facing enormous challenges emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic and the wars and geopolitical tensions in different parts of the world. It is also a period when the perils of climate change are hideously inflicting human and socio-economic calamities. Given their vulnerabilities, the LDCs are the most affected by the economic slumps of such compounding crises, where many of our people continue to endure poverty. It is, thus, imperative to objectively appraise the last Program of Actions' results and set out time-bound, transformative, and doable measures to address the developmental challenges of the LDCs.

In the past decades, various Programs of Action and internationally agreed Development Goals have been formulated. However, very few of these were successfully implemented to improve the quality of life in most LDCs. Regrettably, the majority of the people in the global south, particularly in Africa, remain at the same poverty level, with stagnating socio-economic conditions.

Mr. President,

Eritrea is not spared from the challenges experienced by LDCs. As a country that came out of a thirty-year arduous war for independence, with the subsequent devastating border conflicts and the unjust and unfair UN Security Council sanctions, and the continued unilateral coercive measures, its development endeavors have been critically hampered in realizing the desired aspirations. Nonetheless, the resilience of our people has seen the country redouble its effort in rehabilitating the devastated economy through a development strategy anchored on the policy of social justice and partnership focusing on key sectors required to spur growth such as infrastructure and skills and capacity development.

Cognizant of the practical challenges and limitations, **Mr. President**, allow me to briefly share Eritrea's modest achievements and endeavors in some of the critical development sectors:

1. In the agricultural sector, where operational targets have been set to increase agricultural output through the export of agro-industrial products, commendable progress has been achieved in climate-smart agricultural practices. In addition, work is ongoing to develop the fishery infrastructure and services to tap into the national and export fish market and generate more revenue for the economy.
2. Significant investment has been made in developing reliable access to water for sanitation, food security, and environmental sustainability. In this regard, Eritrea has built 770 dams over the last three decades, increasing the proportion of the rural population with access to safe drinking water from 7% to the current 70%, and in urban areas from 30 to 92 percent.
3. Education and health are essential sectors of Eritrea's sustainable development program and are almost fully subsidized by the government at all levels. The country aims to ensure equitable access and delivery of quality education at all levels for all citizens. The number of schools at all levels have increased significantly from 526 in 1991/92 to 2,254 in 2020/21 and enrolment rate levels from 346,266 in 1997/98 to 619,180 in 2020/21,

respectively. In the same period, the adult literacy rate improved from 46% to about 77%. During the same period, youth literacy improved from 61 to 93 percent, with male literacy at 94 percent and female literacy at 93 percent. This is recorded to be one of the world's largest increases in youth literacy rates over the past 50 years.

4. Eritrea entered the SDGs period having achieved most of the MDGs related to health. This gave the country the impetus to drive forward with added momentum in the SDGs period. In the past three decades, the number of health facilities have grown fourfold, and the number of healthcare workers increased threefold. Healthcare services have been made almost free with access to healthcare within a 10 km radius for 80% and a 5km radius for 70% of the population. The maternal mortality ratio dropped by 82 percent, the neonatal mortality rate by 49 percent, and the under-five mortality rate reduced by 75 percent. The average annual rate of reduction in under-five mortality in this period is estimated at 4.5 percent – among the fastest in the world. HIV prevalence rate is below 1%. Additionally, the National Immunization Programme is nearly universal, with more than 95 percent of children fully immunized for their age. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Eritrea maintained the lowest death and infection rates. As a result of this and other pertinent factors, life expectancy at birth increased significantly from 48 years in 1991 to 67 years at present. However, there still remain challenges that Eritrea needs to surmount in order to expedite progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC), SDG 3, and other health-related SDGs.
5. The road network in Eritrea has expanded from approximately 4,930 km in 1991 to more than 15,100 km at present. This has resulted in over 85 percent of cities and villages in the country being connected by roads. In addition, an efficient public transport system exists connecting most towns and villages. Telecommunication infrastructure through both fixed and mobile phones has been built from scratch and this currently serves most of the country.
6. Eritrea is highly endowed with renewable energy sources whose development has been constrained by a lack of capital for investment and other challenges. However, progress has been made over the last three decades by increasing electricity generation capacity from almost non-existent (18MW) to around 200MW. Access to electricity has increased from 40 percent in 2020 to the current 52 percent. Access in urban areas is 76 percent, while in rural areas it is around 40 percent. It is envisioned that investment in energy will be

increased using resources from the extractive industry and the support of international development partners.

Mr. President,

To conclude, Eritrea is committed to increasing productivity and diversifying the economy through the adoption of science and technology. It is also keen to promote regional cooperation and integration to enhance trade amongst other development objectives. Like any other developing country, Eritrea is in a race against time to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and regain lost opportunities. The remaining seven years call upon us for a renewed commitment and partnership to ensure the benefits from skill and technology transfer to spur social and economic development aspirations. In this regard, Eritrea views the Doha Program of Action as an opportunity to expand partnerships and hence it will continue to coordinate with development partners and earnestly endeavor to transform the quality of life of all its citizens.

Thank You for Your Kind Attention!