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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to UN, on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, at high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
General Assembly Hall, UNHQ, 15 December 2015**

Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor.

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of 48 least developed countries. The Group of LDCs associates itself with the intervention made by the President of the Group of 77 & China.

2. We would like to congratulate all delegations for the efforts everyone put in for ensuring adoption of an outcome document that has been agreed by consensus. After intense and long negotiations, we have been able to produce a document that is acceptable to all of us, and let us remind ourselves, Mr. President, that in itself is a victory of multilateralism.

Mr. President,

3. The Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Geneva Plan of Action on WSIS flagged that least developed countries need special attention in their efforts to establish telecommunication infrastructure. In Tunis Agenda of 2005, the need of coordinated assistance for LDCs in the area of infrastructure for ICT was reiterated. It was highlighted that relevant parties, i.e., service providers should be encouraged to provide commercial internet service in LDCs at affordable cost, considering the constraints faced by these countries.

4. The Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for LDCs, adopted by the UN Member States in 2011, set specific target of significantly increasing access to telecommunication services and to strive for providing ***everyone*** in the least developed countries affordable access to the Internet by 2020. This has been reinforced in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and as the target 9.c of 2030 Agenda, it has become one of the early-

harvests that need to be achieved. The overall credibility and attainability of sustainable development goals will largely depend on our ability to meet this deadline.

5. Against these goals and targets set by the international community and the governments of the least developed countries, the hard reality is that only 5 per cent of households in the least developed countries have internet access. In terms of broadband internet access, with exception of very few LDCs, most of the LDC have very little or basically insignificant broadband access in rural areas. There is strong probability that the digital divide, with rapid advent of newer technologies, will continue to grow, and the least developed countries will be further left behind.

6. The least developed countries have been putting their utmost efforts to fulfill their part of the commitments made in the area of ICT. Most of the LDCs have modern and relevant ICT policies commensurate with their national realities, yet progress is slow. International cooperation is of utmost importance for ensuring that necessary infrastructure is set up in LDCs, and then appropriate technology is transferred to these countries for providing easy internet access to peoples at all levels of life.

7. On this point, the least developed countries call upon the international community, international organizations, private sector and other stakeholders to provide attention, and meaningful assistance to the efforts of the LDCs in building and strengthening ICT infrastructure in these countries. The concerns and constraints of least developed countries are yet to be adequately reflected in the different WSIS outcome documents. Even when there are specific commitments by the partners, those have not been realized. In Geneva Plan of Action, specific call to developed countries has been reiterated, asking them to fulfill the commitment of providing 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of their GNI to LDCs as ODA. Without support of the development partners, least developed countries will not be able to merge in the information and communication technology highway successfully.

Mr. President,

8. There is vast opportunity of building ICT based societies in the least developed countries, with their resource of knowledge-hungry youth population. Appropriate policy interventions, supported by technical assistance, can unlock the potentials of these young entrepreneurs and workforce. Internet based free-lancing, contributing in the area of creative applications can help the LDCs leapfrog in their development efforts. We deeply appreciate the support by the international community in this regard, and urge them for enhancing their assistance.

Mr. President,

9. In this context, allow me to touch briefly upon this subject in my national capacity. Bangladesh believes access to information by people at all levels of life is a fundamental requirement for national development. The Government of Bangladesh puts high importance on ICT as a key enabler and tool for its development plan. At present, all areas of Bangladesh, at the most grassroots level of local government, are connected through internet. E-governance has been launched at all levels, and people now do not need to go to the district headquarters to fill out different government forms, submit applications, buy or sell properties etc. Already 600 mobile apps have been created in Bangladesh in this regard. We are now working on expanding optical fiber network to every corner of Bangladesh, along with video-conferencing centers at the local levels, e-learning systems, Wi-Fi hotspots and desktop cloud.

10. Providing priority to information systems has been directly benefitting the economy as well. At present, Bangladesh earns about US\$300 million annually from export of ICT services, and more than 200,000 people are employed in this sector, including freelancers. It is expected that earning only from outsourcing of ICT services will generate US\$1 billion annually for Bangladesh within next five years. This progress in ICT sector is commensurate with the “Vision 2021” of a digital Bangladesh as envisioned by Hon’ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This will pave the way for our graduation from the LDC status within next six years. We are closely working with all our partners, including other least developed countries, for sharing the best practices, and for transfer of technologies at mutually agreed terms that benefit us all.

11. Finally, Mr. President, the international community, including development partners and other stakeholders, need to fulfill their commitment of helping LDCs to build durable physical as well as ICT infrastructure for ensuring sustainable development. World Summit for Information Society is the platform for fulfilling that commitment in a tangible manner. Information and communication technology will play a catalytic role in implementing 2030 Agenda, and, with appropriate support of the Member States and other stakeholders including private sector, the least developed countries are confident to be able to achieve their goal of eventual graduation.

Thank you.
