

With the help of CIERP's Experiential Learning Fund, I was able to attend the 5th United Nations Conference for Least Developed Countries from March 5 to 8th. Hosted by the Qatari government, the conference took place in Doha's state of the art Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC). Situated minutes outside of the downtown area in Gharafat Al Rayyan, the QNCC became home to 5,000 participants which included 47 Heads of State or Government, 130 ministers and vice-minister, countless of United Nations staff and member of civil society. Amongst them, a group of 9 students, me included, represented Tufts university as one of the very few representations of academic at the conference.

Our group comprised of seven Tufts undergrads, one graduate student from the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and I represented the Fletcher School. Our role at LDC5 was to observe as many of the Plenaries, High-Level Thematic Roundtables, and side events hosted by either the Private Sector, Youth, or Civil Society forums as possible. The Conference officially commenced on Sunday, March 5th with the Opening Plenary where the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, gave an impassioned speech about the structural impediments to sustainable development that least developed, landlocked, and small island nations are facing as they become more vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. Secretary-General Guterres called on all nations and development partner to establish "a new Bretton Woods moment", essentially proclaiming that meaningful structural change can only be achieved by a necessary reform of the global financial system.

It was a profound moment to hear him explain how the global financial system which was created by wealthy industrialized countries to serve their own interests, is extremely unfair to LDCs which are forced to pay exorbitant interest rates as high as eight times than those in developed nations. A key statistic I took away with me from this plenary session, was that 25 developing economies are spending over 20% of government revenues solely on servicing debt. It is undoubtedly the effort of the industrial world that can alter the systems which push LDCs further into poverty and away from the potential of "graduation". He went on to highlight three key areas where LDCs "need a revolution of support". First, he called for a minimum of \$500 billion a year to developing countries, as well as 0.15 to 0.20% of GNI for official development assistance, as well as increased efforts to prevent tax evasion and illicit financial flows. Secondly, he called for expanding contingency funding and the inclusion of integrating disaster and pandemic clauses into debt instruments. Finally, he urged developed countries to simplify access to climate finance, double adaptation finance, and replenish the UN-backed Green Climate Fund, on top of providing early warning systems to every person in the world within five years.

The theme of the conference was "From Potential to Prosperity", and over its five-day duration it served as space for new pledges of support. Nevertheless, its functioning purpose was to step beyond the agenda formation but to actually spur the delivery of the agreed commitments as laid out on the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA). Unlike other UN Conferences, this one came with an adopted agenda that was finalized and submitted to the

United Nations General Assembly in 2022. It's aimed at manifesting a new generation of renewed and strengthened commitments between the LDCs and their development partners. Its antecedent was the Istanbul Programme of Action. It will be similarly proceeded by a new agenda post 2031 should the current 46 countries fail to graduate from the LDC category.

Finally, the conference addressed 6 thematic focus areas as they were included in the DPoA. These were: eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind; leveraging the power of science, technology, and innovation to achieve the SDGs; supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity; enhancing international trade of LDCs and regional integration; addressing climate change, environmental degradation, and recovery from COVID-19; mobilizing international solidarity and global partnerships for the sustainable graduate of LDCs. Along the current plenaries, I had the pleasure of attending several events including the following:

- **Civil Society Forums:** Taking Stock: Multiple Crises and Challenges for LDCs, Digital Economy and Sustainable Development
- **High-Level Thematic Roundtables:** Leveraging the Power of Science, Technology & Innovation for the Sustainable Development of the LDCs, Enhancing the Participation of LDCs in International Trade & Regional Integration, Climate Change & Supporting the Environment
- **Private Sector Forums:** Agriculture & Rural Development, Digital Connectivity, Sustainable Tourism, Microsoft Airband Partnerships, Climate Change
- **Side Events:** Blending the Public and Private Sectors for Results in LDCs (organized by the WBG and Microsoft), Exploring LDC trade priorities for the next decade

Overall, the journey to Doha was one that I will cherish for a very long time. I had the opportunity to network with some of the most inspiring individuals I've met so far. Youth delegates from Lesotho, Zambia, and other countries engaged me in meaningful discussions about the future of the global order under the imminent threats of climate change, disease, and the pitfalls of industrialization. As a student of global affairs, I pride myself in having an acute awareness of geography, on top of the most pressing challenges the world faces. However, allowing myself to be a student during the week of the conference apprised me with new perspectives from regions of the world with which I've had less direct academic and professional exposure. Engaging with the Youth Delegates, or what I should refer to as my counterparts, added new meaning to "From Potential to Prosperity". There is simply so much opportunity that comes with investing in youth, not just in LDCs, but in any part of the world. I believe this experience opened my eyes to just how much prosperity remains to be unlocked across the world. I am grateful to CIERP for allowing me to attend a multilateral convening of this kind so early in my career, as I am certain the experiences I attained along the way will guide me in all my future roles.

Photos:

A selfie with the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and Fletcher alumna, Ms. Rabab Fatima.



The giant spider inside the main hall of the QNCC.



Private Sector Forum on Agriculture and Rural Development. Speakers included Andrej Duda, President of Poland, Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Brad Staples, CEO of APCO Worldwide, and others.





At the High-Level Thematic Roundtable: Climate Change & Protecting the Environment



At the Opening Plenary!



The Tufts Delegation.



Dinner with Foreign Service Officer and Fletcher Alumna, Mariya Ilyas (pictured second to the left)