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## Landlocked in africa

Speech by Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser in Africa and High Representative of the Least Developed Countries, Landland Developing Countries and Small States Island Developing Countries at a dinner at Manhattanville University, New York, April 2, 2008. Mr. President, my colleague and dear friend Ambassador Ahmad Kamal, faculty and students of Manhattanville University, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour and a privilege to be invited to address you tonight. The subject you have asked me to talk about this evening: Mali – a country in Africa and in the world is one that is very close to my heart, from both a personal and professional perspective. Not only am I a citizen of Mali, but I have also spent much of my professional life serving the country in various capacities. Above all, I was honoured to play a role in Mali's national reconciliation efforts that paved the way for peace and democracy in the country. I have also had the privilege of representing the country as ambassador to the United Nations. Mr President, if there is one country that can provide a snapshot of the groups of countries That I represent today - the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing countries, and Africa, that country is Mali. Not only is Mali one of the 49 least developed countries in the world, described as the poorest and weakest segment of the Un, but it is also one of the 31 landlocked developing countries. It is therefore not surprising that Mali suffers from almost every development challenge you can imagine. Allow me to give a few figures to illustrate the matter. Almost half of Mali's 13.5 million people live in absolute poverty, defined as less than a dollar a day. According to the UNDP Human Development Index, Mali has the fifth lowest level of human development in the world, just ahead of Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau and Niger. Human development is measured in terms of income, life expectancy and educational attainment. Only 24% of Malian adults can read and write, and almost 40% of children who should be in primary school are out of school. Mali, which is nearly twice the size of Texas, is vulnerable to drought and faces further desertification. Already, 60% of the country is a desert. With such daunting problems, Mali is quite unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which include reducing the proportion of people in absolute poverty by half and those suffering from hunger by 2015. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as I mentioned earlier, the problems in Mali are the problems in most least developed countries. These countries are characterised by rampant poverty, a lack of basic infrastructure and services, weak dependent on primary commodities for export and limited technical competence. A large number of them are burdened with high rates of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, hunger, conflicts, unsustainable population growth, and a heavy debt burden. Despite the recent efforts of the international community to provide preferential treatment for its exports, the role of smaller countries in international trade remains negligible. Although they account for 12 percent of the world's population, the least European countries' share of world trade is below 1 percent, comprising mostly some agricultural and mineral products primary commodities. In Mali, for example, cotton, gold and livestock account for almost 90% of total export income. For the least developed countries that are also trapped like Mali, these development challenges are moving away from international markets. The lack of territorial access to the sea means that imports and exports have to pass through other countries, making them exceptionally costly. These are not only long distances to the sea, but also poor transport infrastructure and often cumbersome customs procedures. It takes the landlocked developing countries 20 to 25 days more to import or export goods than it takes transit developing countries. This means extra costs, where each extra day costs 0.5 percent of the value of goods. Up to 75% of these delays are caused by pre-arrival documents, customs and inspections, which means that with the right policies and technologies, the cost of transport for landlocked developing countries can be significantly reduced. In most landlocked developing countries, road transport is the primary mode of transport. Not only is it more expensive, but it is often slower than rail or water transport would be due to the sad state of the roads. In Africa, for example, less than a third of the already restricted road network has been paved. No wonder, Africa has some of the highest transportation costs in the world. Indeed, for some African hander countries, transport costs can be as high as 77% of the export value. It is not possible to be competitive in the global market with such high transport costs. As a result, they are among the poorest developing countries in the inland countries. They suffer from economic stagnation, which of course results in increased poverty. It is not by chance that of the 15 countries that have the lowest level of human development, 9 are inland. Like the least developed countries, many of the developing countries that are landlocked countries will not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, with this kind of problem facing Africa, the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, you may be surprised to hear that I am quite optimistic about their prospects for development. I am convinced that countries can develop, take their rightful place in the international economy and prosper. What is the source of my optimism? Once again, Mali gives a very good example of the kind of progress that can be made in these countries, given the right domestic policies and the necessary international support. In fact, despite all the daunting challenges I have described, Mali has managed to bring about an average economic growth rate of around 5% per year since the early 2000s. As a result, the percentage of the population living on less than a dollar per day declined from 56 percent to 47 percent between 2001 and 2006. This is not good enough, of course, because it would take at least 25 years to meet the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the proportion of people in extreme poverty. But it is a source of encouragement on which the country, and indeed the international community, can build. Mali has also made very significant progress towards peace and democratic governance, which contradicts the view that it is not possible to achieve peace, stability and good governance in the face of extreme poverty. Since 1992, when multi-party elections were held after years of military and one-party rule, three successful general elections have been held, which have been hailed both in Mali and internationally as true reflection sensieus. As you would expect, there were certainly some shortcomings. However, all problems were solved by constitutional and legal means. In general, these modest advances are shared by the majority of least developed and African countries. The least developed and African countries are more democratic than they were 20 years ago. Although it has not yet had the desired effect on poverty reduction, a large number of African and least developed countries have had reasonable levels of economic growth since the beginning of the decade, thanks to internal economic reforms and liberalisation. It must be acknowledged, however, that the rise in commodity prices on the international market has been an important factor in the good economic fortunes of recent years in these countries. It is also true that this relatively impressive economic growth has not been shared by all the least developed and African countries. It has tended to concentrate in the mineral-rich countries. What all this means is that there is a good basis for promoting and achieving sustainable economic development in these countries.

Although economic reform and liberalisation have had some positive results, it is necessary to go a step further and address the fundamental constraints that continue to hold these countries back. These structural constraints are both internal and external. Internally, the lack of adequate physical infrastructure, in particular transport, energy and communication, as well as skilled workers continue to hamper productive of these countries. These are not challenges that can be easily overcome by economic liberalisation. There is a need for massive public investment in roads, railways, schools, hospitals, power generation and communications infrastructure. Obviously, the necessary investment in these areas is far beyond the means of a country like Mali. International aid is therefore crucial. The international community has recognised the critical need to provide support to these countries if they are to emerge from poverty. Thus the eighth Millennium Development Goal talks about developing a global partnership for development. For the least developed countries and LandlockedDevelopingStates, the international community has established specific action programmes, with specific objectives, to translate these partnerships into concrete actions. For the least developed countries, there is the action programme for the decade 2001-2010 adopted in Brussels in 2001 and for the inland developing countries, we have the Almaty Action Programme adopted in Kazakhstan in 2003. And, of course, for Africa, there is Africa's own initiative, the new Partnership for Africa's Development, which has been fully supported by the international community. Unfortunately, this display of international solidarity has not always been matched by action. While significant progress has been made in recent years in the areas of foreign aid, debt cancellation and trade preferences, it is still well below the targets set in the programmes I have mentioned. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which includes the world's most powerful economies, has shown that support for the world's poorest countries is increasing, but that it remains below the agreed commitments. Similarly, despite laudable initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act of the United States, and the Everything But Arms of the European Union, the least developed countries still do not have fully duty-free and quota-free access to the markets of developed countries under the 1000-year 2012 action programme. Moreover, it is in those areas where the least developed countries are most competitive, such as textiles and agricultural products, that their access to the markets of developed countries is most hindered. Granting duty-free and quota-free market access to export computers, for example, does little for them, as they do not produce computers. By contrast, limiting their ability to export agricultural products, through customs duties, other non-tariff barriers or domestic subsidies, condemns millions of farmers to eternal poverty. According to the World Bank, agricultural subsidies and aid in developed countries add up to about \$350 billion annually, more than GDP in Africa and times the level of foreign aid. For poor countries, this income is lost. Think cotton, for example. Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso and Chad earn a very significant share of their export income from cotton, accounting for 17% of the world's export market. However, the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of farmers, who are mostly smallfarmers, are threatened by lower cotton prices as a result of dumping cheap, subsidised cotton on the world market. In 2003, for example, the United States exported cotton at 47 percent below the cost of production. It is estimated that West African countries lose \$250 million each year as a result of U.S. cotton dumping. A World Bank study has shown that taking cotton subsidies would increase cotton exports from sub-Saharan Africa by 75%. Developing countries' share of global cotton exports would increase from the current 56% to 85% in 2015. You can imagine the difference this would make to the poor farmers in these countries. Probably, not as much as 60% of the children who are supposed to be at school in Mali would be outside school. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mali and the rest of the world's poor countries are not condemned to poverty by fate. They have shown their potential to overcome the odds and not only share, but also contribute to the world's wealth. What is needed is for the international community to live up to its promises and help these countries get back on their feet. A world free from poverty is a better world for all citizens of the world. Thank you for your kind attention. Attention.

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