Mr. High Representative, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The high-level midterm review of the Istanbul Programme of Action does not happen in isolation. Last year was an important year for development and sustainable development in particular. Important decisions were made in Addis Abeba, Sendai, New York and Paris. The world agreed, through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, to ‘leave no-one behind.’ This week in Istanbul, world leaders take decisions to prevent and reduce human suffering of millions of people who are vulnerable to conflicts and disasters. We are starting to implement these commitments and focus on their follow-up processes like the HLPF in July, where 22 countries have volunteered to report on the first steps of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

These processes and their implementation will affect all of us and in particular the least developed countries, being the most vulnerable segment of the international community. The priority areas of the Istanbul Programme of Action are as timely and valid as ever and the mid-term review is well placed after these important events. Common goals like eradicating poverty, achieving internationally agreed sustainable development goals and enabling the graduation from the LDC category are mutually supportive goals for all these processes. Their implementation requires mutual accountability and deeper international cooperation as well as enhanced partnerships also with the private sector as shown by the business forum organized before the review conference. Other stakeholders like non-governmental organisations and parliamentarians should also have a strong role.

At the same time the LDCs represent an enormous potential for world economic growth, stability and prosperity. We can all learn from each other through sharing best practices and lessons learnt. We can together identify obstacles and constraints as well as actions and initiatives to overcome them. We can also identify new challenges and emerging issues and particularly what they mean to the least developed countries.

Graduation is an important goal for the LDCs. We should all support them in graduating from the LDC status. Many have already shown readiness for this process and hopefully more LDCs will be able to take the same path. This progress is encouraging. Hopefully in the course of the next 15 years the principle of leaving-no-one-behind will become true for all of us, also for the LDCs and their citizens.

When graduation happens to a broader extent it might become feasible to integrate the LDC countries fully into other processes and make them benefit more fully of their results. The need for a separate LDC track would then not be necessary.
One of the important cross-cutting issues and a separate goal of the 2030 Agenda is gender equality. There is an urgent need to enhance women’s and girls’ rights in LDCs, especially in rural areas. Strong gender and youth policies are needed to achieve that. Equally, we have to ensure that women are empowered and that their social and economic rights are fulfilled: much still remains to be done in this respect. Women’s role in decision-making at all levels also needs to be improved. All actors including businesses and the private sector should be encouraged to advance gender equality through actions that contribute to women’s economic empowerment, including the share of women in decision making at all levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland is committed to supporting the least developed countries, many of which are our long term partners in development cooperation. We have supported their participation in the 2030 Agenda and the FfD negotiations as well as some other events. In spite of the pressure put by economic constraints on the official development assistance Finland has been able to keep its percentage of the GNI to the LDCs close to 0,20 %. We continue with this trend in our new Government report on development policy adopted earlier this year. We encourage emerging economies and UMICs also to increase their financial support to developing countries and to LDCs in particular, and to set targets and timelines for doing so.

We thank the Government of Turkey for hosting this conference. We also thank the co-facilitators as well as the High-Representative and his staff for their dedicated work in order to make this Conference a success. In our process we need to focus on country ownership and leadership as well as the implementation of the IPoA and we need to be action oriented in our efforts to support the LDCs.