



**Statement
by**

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for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries and Small Island Developing States

at the

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Africa**

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Distinguished Ministers,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me express my sincere thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for providing me with the opportunity to address such a distinguished and high level gathering, Ministers of Transport and Infrastructure of Africa. I would also like to extend my sincere congratulations to the African Union, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Sub-Saharan African Transport Programme for the excellent initiative to hold this Ministerial Conference focusing on transport sector indicators for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Let me start by quoting the recent article published in the New York Times, which talks about how a new road changed the life in Hurufa, a village in landlocked Ethiopia. The life in the village became so different that people started referring to time sequence as “Before the Road” and “After the Road”. Because of the road, people can take their sick to the hospital and their children to distant schools, farmers can now easily transport their crops to market. This is an example that shows that road building is becoming the way to combat rural poverty in Africa. This also shows that how transport is a necessary precondition for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals to halve the poverty by 2015. And I believe this is true also in other parts of the developing world.

Mr. Chairman,

The fundamental geographical difficulties faced by landlocked developing countries continue to be a major constraint for their development. It is increasingly recognised that excessive transport costs create more important barrier to foreign markets than tariffs. For these countries, excessive transport costs are a more insidious dampener of international trade than tariffs. Half of the world’s 31 landlocked developing countries are in Africa. Their situation is further aggravated because of the inadequate infrastructure development and costly and inefficient border crossing and other procedures in their transit neighbours most of which are too poor to develop their transit system without major infusion of external assistance. Establishment of efficient transit transport systems is, therefore, a very urgent issue for this vast continent. Without resolving transport issue of Africa, our attention to other areas of development would not be purposeful.

Success or failure of trade in Africa, especially in landlocked developing countries amongst them, is largely determined by transport availability and cost. As a result of the Uruguay Round, MFN tariffs for most African countries for major developed

markets (United States, Canada European Union and Japan) will range between 3.7 and 7.1. The average cost of transport for landlocked developing countries' exports is four times greater (approximately 15 per cent) than these tariffs. It doubles the same indicator for developing countries as a group (8.1 per cent) and almost four times higher than the average for developed countries (4.0 per cent). Africa has the highest freight –to-export ratio. Ten of fifteen landlocked developing countries in Africa (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda) spent up to 40 per cent of their export earnings for the transportation and insurance services. This is a huge burden. Priority should be given to easing this burden.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to place the needed emphasis on persisting problems faced by landlocked developing countries, the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions was held in August 2003 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, which happens to be the largest landlocked country with the longest distance from the nearest seaport. This first high-level global event of the United Nations adopted the Almaty Programme of Action on transit transport cooperation.

The Almaty Programme of Action identifies specific actions in five priority areas to establish efficient transit transport systems. These are: fundamental transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, international support measures, and implementation and review. The Almaty Programme addresses transit, trade and development issues in a holistic manner. The Programme's recognition of the vital link between transport, international trade and economic and social development - and its determination to confront the challenges of landlockedness - make it a milestone initiative. It is a well-focused, comprehensive document, which covers the core areas necessary for the progressive integration of landlocked developing countries into the world economy and international trading system through establishing efficient transit systems.

The United Nations system is seriously embarked on the implementation of this Programme. The United Nations Secretary-General attaches particular attention to its timely implementation. In this context, our efforts began with the preparation of the roadmap towards the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action to provide guidance and a well-coordinated and coherent approach for the process. The roadmap was endorsed at the inter-agency meeting convened in early February 2004 in New York. Subsequently, the General Assembly also supported the roadmap. The roadmap identified areas that would require immediate action. These include the identification of major "missing links" in Africa, Asia and Latin America; the creation of subregional priority projects to develop infrastructure and facilitate trade; establishment of national trade facilitation boards; coherent and coordinated technical assistance; resources mobilization; and promotion of the accession to international treaties and conventions on transit and transport. This global programme should be implemented in the African context on a priority basis. Larger share of resources needs to be directed to Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

I am coming to your gathering from the High-Level Meeting hosted by Kazakhstan on the Role of International, Regional and Sub-regional Organizations in the implementation of the Almaty Programme. Representatives from about 40 organizations, including the World Bank, the WTO, the WCO, UNCTAD, IRU, ICAO, UN Regional Commissions as well as most African RECs, consulted on strategies for establishing efficient transit transport systems. These multilateral organizations agreed to continue consultations on the establishment of a coordinated technical cooperation programme in order to maximize the benefits of their support for landlocked and transit developing countries. We also moved a step closer in our efforts to have broadly acceptable indicators to measure the progress for establishing efficient transit transport systems. In this regard, we decided to continue our work to further improve the time/cost methodology. This methodology would be very useful for the African purposes. The representatives of these organizations also stressed the need to change current project proposal evaluation practices solely based on commercial considerations. Instead, poverty eradication and social development benefits should be cornerstone of the project evaluation for infrastructure development. Such approach is particularly important in the African context.

Mr. Chairman,

The framework agreement of the World Trade Organizations relating to the Doha round of trade negotiations reached last August in Geneva has a very relevant element for transport and transit in particular. Trade facilitation is included as one of the topics of the Doha round. As you know, transit is a prominent aspect of trade facilitation. I am particularly encouraged that this process will have a strong component for technical cooperation. The African countries, particularly landlocked and transit countries among them, should seize this opportunity. The internationally binding rules on trade facilitation and transit will certainly facilitate the speedy movement and clearance of goods to further reduce trade transaction costs.

Mr. Chairman,

2005 is a momentous year for the United Nations as we prepare for the September summit in New York to review the progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The MDG project report launched recently has rightfully emphasized that, and I quote“ the MDG based strategies in landlocked developing countries should focus on recommendations, which are included in the roadmap for implementing the Almaty Programme of Action on transit transport cooperation”. Outcome of this Conference would bring an important contribution to the meaningful outcome of the September summit. It might be even useful to organize a High-Level parallel event or round table on African transport needs and relevant indicators for

measuring progress in order to sensitise the world leaders and to have this issue reflected in the final outcome of the September summit.

My office, the Office of the High Representative focusing on the least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries will spare no efforts to highlight transit transport needs of the African countries. As the highest office at the United Nations with the mandate to enhance the mobilization and galvanization of international support for the weakest segments of the international community, Africa has been a priority for action of my office.

The future of Africa is closely linked to the establishment of viable regional transport network. I am confident that today's Conference would make a substantive contribution towards that objective.

I wish every success to your deliberations.

I thank you.