Background
As countries that have no sea coast, the 32 LLDCs must transport most of their merchandise trade through one or more transit countries. This transit across other States’ territories is often beset by a wide array of administrative, technical, logistical and physical problems that substantially increases the trade costs. The high cost of trade is a major stumbling block to LLDCs’ equitable and competitive access to global markets and their ability to fully harness their trade and overall sustainable development potential.

The years 2014 and 2015 were historic and significant for the LLDCs and the larger international community. The development needs due to the special challenges imposed by their particular geographic situation of the LLDCs were affirmed in the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs for the Decade 2014 – 2024 (VPoA) adopted in November 2014 at the Second UN Conference on the LLDCs. The VPoA is a holistic and results-oriented programme comprising of an overarching goal, six specific goals as well as time bound specific objectives in six priority areas namely: 1) fundamental transit policy issues, 2) infrastructure development and maintenance, 3) international trade and trade facilitation, 4) regional integration and cooperation, 5) structural economic transformation and 6) means of implementation. The priority areas include 21 specific objectives and 87 actions to be undertaken by LLDCs, transit developing countries and development partners to help ensure the achievement of the goals of the VPoA.

The VPoA has six specific goals namely: (a) to promote unfettered, efficient and cost-effective access to and from the sea by all means of transport, on the basis of the freedom of transit, and other related measures, in accordance with applicable rules of international law; (b) to reduce trade transaction costs and transport costs and improve international trade services through simplification and standardization of rules and regulations, so as to increase the competitiveness of exports of LLDCs and reduce the
costs of imports, thereby contributing to the promotion of rapid and inclusive economic development; (c) to develop adequate transit transport infrastructure networks and complete missing links connecting LLDCs; (d) to effectively implement bilateral, regional and international legal instruments and strengthen regional integration; (e) to promote growth and increased participation in global trade, through structural transformation related to enhanced productive capacity development, value addition, diversification and reduction of dependency on commodities; and (f) to enhance and strengthen international support for LLDCs to enable them to meet challenges arising from landlockedness in order to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development.

The successful implementation of the VPoA will require not only renewed and strengthened partnerships between LLDCs, transit countries and development partners, but also enhanced support and partnership efforts with relevant international and regional organizations, between private and public sectors and stronger and widened North-South and South-South cooperation. The Livingstone Call for Action for the Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA adopted at the High-Level Follow-up Meeting to the Second United Nations Conference on the LLDCs that was held in Livingstone, Zambia from 2 to 4 June 2015 stresses the key actions required to ensure the implementation of the VPoA.

In July 2015, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda was adopted at the Third UN Conference on Financing for Development and which has several specific references to the LLDCs. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda reaffirms the need to address the special challenges and needs of LLDCs in structurally transforming their economies, harnessing benefits from international trade, and developing efficient transport and transit systems. It stresses that technical assistance and improvement of trade-and transit-related logistics are crucial in enabling LLDCs to fully participate in and benefit from multilateral trade negotiations, effectively implement policies and regulations aimed at facilitating transport and trade, and diversify their export base. It also suggests a new forum to bridge the infrastructure gap. The international community indicated in the AAAA that it will strengthen efforts to address financing gaps and low levels of direct investment faced by the LLDCs and to support the LLDCs to build their national capacity to respond to various kinds of shocks including financial crisis and natural disasters. The AAAA also encourages multilateral development banks, including regional banks, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to address gaps in trade, transport and transit-related regional infrastructure, connecting LLDCs.

In September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda is the overarching development framework which is bold, ambitious, and transformational. The 17 SDGs are relevant for the LLDCs in their pursuit to achieve sustainable development and in addition, the 2030 Agenda makes specific reference to the LLDCs in 15 paragraphs including in 3 SDGs. Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognize the special challenges and needs of LLDCs and support the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.
The year 2015 also witnessed the adoption of a new global Agreement on climate change that was adopted in Paris in December 2015. The Agreement has important provisions for the developing countries under adaptation to strengthen their ability of to deal with climate impacts. Under the Agreement, all countries will submit updated climate plans called nationally determined contributions (NDCs) towards achieving the objective of the Convention and developing country Parties would express their adaptation needs in their intended NDCs. Governments will be expected to submit updated NDCs every five years. The new Agreement also establishes the principle that future national plans or NDCs will have to be a progression of previous efforts.

The Paris Agreement resolves to enhance the provision of urgent and adequate finance, technology and capacity-building support to the developing countries. The Agreement strongly urges developed country Parties to scale up their level of financial support, with a concrete roadmap to achieve the goal of jointly providing USD 100 billion annually by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation while significantly increasing adaptation finance from current levels and to further provide appropriate technology and capacity-building support. The Agreement has provisions for mitigation – to reduce emissions fast enough to achieve the temperature goal. The agreement also has a transparency system and global stock-take that will start in 2023 – to account for climate action and assess the collective progress towards the goals of the agreement. The stocktake will be done every five years. There will also be a review of the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support provided for adaptation; and a review of the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation. Effective implementation of the agreement will help the LLDCs to build their resilience to climate change.

In December 2015, at the WTO ministerial conference in Nairobi, members agreed on the Nairobi Package which contains Ministerial Decisions on agriculture, cotton and issues related to least-developed countries. The decision on elimination of agricultural export subsidies is particularly significant in improving the global trading environment and will help to level the playing field in agriculture markets, to the benefit of farmers and exporters in the LLDCs. The other agricultural decisions taken cover public stockholding for food security purposes, and to develop a special safeguard mechanism for developing countries, and measures related to cotton. The Nairobi Package comes after the 2013 conference in Bali that delivered a number of important outcomes, including the Trade Facilitation Agreement which has a potential positive impact on effective transit procedures and if fully implemented will be beneficial to the LLDCs. The Trade Facilitation Agreement marked a milestone achievement by the WTO for the LLDCs as it aims at further expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit and thereby significantly cutting the costs of trade. Early ratification and subsequent implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement is very important.

In view of these developments, in their meeting of 19 November 2015, the LLDC Group recommended the need to have a retreat where: all the issues pertaining to the LLDCs could be discussed intensively on their implications for the LLDCs, the LLDCs can be briefed of the follow-up processes on the important development that were adopted; and identify a structured approach and well thought out suggestions on follow-up activities that the LLDCs could focus on. The year 2016 is an important
year to start implementing the new development framework and the retreat will be important in guiding the LLDCs on the specific areas to focus on.

**Objective**
The meeting will:

- Analyze all the recent developments on the global development arena and how they relate to the special needs of the LLDCs, closely analyzing the interlinkages/ overlaps;
- Brief the LLDCs on the follow-up processes (at all levels national, regional and global) to the new global development frameworks clearly identifying areas that the LLDCs should focus on;
- Identify and recommend ways of fostering coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, AAAA and VPoA at national level in the LLDCs and at regional and global levels to ensure success.

**Expected outcome**
The Meeting is expected to come up with concrete ideas and activities that the LLDCs should pursue as a group in order to ensure better outcomes.

**Participants**
Participants for the retreat will include Ambassadors of the LLDCs and few selected partners, and a limited number of representatives of key UN and other international agencies who will be invited as resource persons from New York/Washington DC (DESA, EOSG, World Bank) and academic experts.

**Documentation**
i) The Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014-2024;
ii) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
iii) The Addis Ababa Action Agenda;
iv) The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement;
v) Outcome of the WTO 10th Ministerial Conference
vi) Communiqué of the Meeting of Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries held on 16th December 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya, at the 10th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization
vii) General Assembly Resolutions on the LLDCs; on the HLPF.