A. Introduction

As countries with no direct access to the sea, the thirty-two 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 cost of doing trade. These high costs of trade are major stumbling blocks to LLDCs’ equitable and competitive access to global markets and their ability to fully harness their trade and overall sustainable development potential. It is in this context that the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) prepared a Global Report and corresponding Regional Reports that provide a review of the status of transit issues, trade and trade facilitation, identifying key achievements and constraints and suggesting solutions required to address transit issues for the successful participation of the LLDCs in international trade and for their overall development.

The Experts Group Meeting on Improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs was held on 10 and 11 December 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The objectives of the meeting were to: review, analyse and assess the status of the key issues in transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs including peer review of the draft reports; provide a platform to share ideas, lessons and best practices on how to improve transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation; exchange views on future policies, programmes and initiatives that can improve transit co-operation at bilateral, regional and global levels; and offer suggestions on how to strengthen the draft reports.

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy Development, Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service of UN-OHRLLS. The meeting was attended by about 60 participants that included experts from the United Nations System organizations, international and regional organizations, LLDCs, transit developing and donor countries, the private sector, and other stakeholders. The full presentations made in the meeting are posted on the following url: http://unohrlls.org/expert-group-meeting-on-trade/.

B. Opening Session

The meeting was officially opened by Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, who in his opening remarks underlined the importance of transit cooperation to help reduce the trade costs for the LLDCs. He strongly emphasized the need to reduce these high costs so as to improve the export competitiveness of the LLDCs, stressing that it requires addressing the transit issues between the LLDCs and the transit countries at the border, between borders, and behind the border by solving the issues plaguing both the hard physical infrastructure and the soft infrastructure that includes the legal framework and institutions.

Mr. Acharya noted that the Vienna Programme of Action, is a holistic and results-oriented programme based on renewed and strengthened partnerships between LLDCs, their transit
neighbours and their development partners to address the special needs of the LLDCs. He stressed the importance that the VPoA placed on the full implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in reducing the trade costs for the LLDCs, citing that the WTO’s 2015 World Trade Report predicts full implementation of the TFA will reduce trade costs of members by an average of 14.5% and increase GDP growth by up to 0.5% annually.

Mr. Acharya also applauded the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was adopted in September 2015, which recognizes that LLDCs face special challenges and deserve special attention. He also discussed the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which reaffirmed 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. Mr. Acharya indicated that both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda support the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs, and that world leaders at the Post 2015 Development Summit also observed that the full implementation and realization of the Vienna Programme of Action is integral to the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. Acharya concluded his opening statement by outlining the studies and work done by his Office on behalf of the LLDCs, and reiterated that the purpose of this meeting was to provide a platform to share ideas, lessons and best practices and to exchange views on future policies, programmes and initiatives that can improve transit co-operation to support the LLDCs in achieving strong, sustained and inclusive trade-led growth. He stressed that achieving transit systems where goods and people from the LLDCs can move throughout their regions with minimum delays and cost is not an easy goal, but with everyone’s contributions, he was optimistic that they can make progress towards achieving this agenda.

He also stressed that there is need to closely look at why the currently existing relevant international and regional agreements are not being fully implemented and posed the following questions to the meeting. Do we have very high-level national committee dealing with the issues of transit in all the LLDCs, which can drive the process of ratification and coordinate implementation? What efforts can be made to strengthen these mechanisms and enable them to undertake this work? Are there adequate toolkits or guidelines to help the LLDCs to make progress on transit cooperation? How can we close the infrastructure gap that is so important to enhance connectivity, transit and trade?

C. Presentation of the Global and Regional Reports on Improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs

The meeting continued with the session on the presentation of the Global and Regional Reports, prepared by the UN-OHRLLS and regional experts respectively. Ms. Gladys Mutangadura presented a summary of the Draft of the Global Report, in which she outlined the objectives of the report, the organisation of the report, and some statistics and trends. The objective of the Global Report was to assess the status of transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs using a holistic approach through analysing all the aspects related to transit, including infrastructure development, legal frameworks, institutions, trade, investment, customs and border-crossing procedures, the private sector and others. It also had the objectives
of identifying key achievements and best and effective examples and constraints, and to suggest solutions required to address transit issues for the successful participation of the LLDCs in international trade and for their overall development.

Ms. Mutangadura explained to the meeting that the Global Report was organized through seven chapters: Socio-economic development in LLDCs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; The Legal Framework on Transit Issues; Transit Infrastructure Development; Trade Facilitation, Customs and Border Procedures; LLDCs’ Participation in International and Regional Trade, Means of Implementation; and Recommendations. She then highlighted some data and results found within the report, which all indicated that LLDCs that trailed their transit developing neighbours and the global average when it came to GDP per Capita, the Human Development Index, Costs of Doing Trade, Export Concentration and Diversification, and Share of Global Trade. Ms. Mutangadura concluded her presentation by discussing LLDCs in the context of the Legal Framework on Transit Issues; Transit Infrastructure Development; Trade and Trade Facilitation; and Means of Implementation, summarizing her Office’s findings and recommendations to the LLDCs.

The first regional report that was presented to the meeting was the Africa Regional Report by Dr. Robert Okello. His presentation discussed Priority Areas 1, 2, 3, and 6 of the Vienna Programme of Action, the current projects that are being undertaken with regards to each Priority Area, and the policy implications for Africa. In terms of improving Customs and Border Crossing Procedures, he recommended Customs Unions, ICDs/Dry Ports, Application of ICT, Liberalisation of Visa Requirements and finally One Stop Border Posts. For Priority Area 2, he believed infrastructure development should be the primary focus of LLDCs, as it is the backbone of the physical integration required for sustainable development for Africa.

For Priority Area 3, Dr. Okello informed the committee that the African share of international trade was small and stagnant, with exports dominated by commodities that were vulnerable to regular fluctuations in demand and price. Furthermore, intra-regional trade was the lowest in the world, and intra-African trade in intermediate manufactured goods needed to be more diversified. He also cited statistics showing that African LLDCs had the highest export costs in the world, and stressed that the Regional Economic Communities were pivotal to harmonizing transit policies and practices. For Priority Area 6, he believed in continuing advocating for the special needs of LLDCs in all international actions, expanding the role of the private sector, and the need for strong African leadership in prioritizing and implementing relevant agreements. Dr. Okello concluded his presentation by specifically advocating for the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, and informed the meeting of the current status of African countries on the path towards implementing the TFA.

The Latin America Regional Report was the second regional report that was presented by Ms. Maria Florencia Millan-Placci. Her presentation began by outlining the recent advances in infrastructure and regional integration for Bolivia and Paraguay, the 2 LLDCs in the region, including an Advanced Regional Transit Agreement, Single Customs Documents, Customs Electronic System, Electronic Monitoring Seal, Integrated Control Posts on most borders, Authorized Economic Operators, and the current status of implementing the WTO TFA. She outlined several successful cases of Single Window implementation, aid from the private sector,
and multimodal trade. Her data showed that there has been increased intraregional trade and a reduction in total time to import and export for both Bolivia and Paraguay. Ms. Millan-Placci continued her presentation by stating the challenges that Bolivia and Paraguay still faced, such as long wait times at border, persistently high trade costs and number of trade documents required, and worsening infrastructure indicators. She then concluded by listing potential short-term and medium-term policy options for Bolivia and Paraguay to undertake, such as strengthening public and private sector capacity to effectively apply the transit regulations, and scale up on the value chain of export goods.

The third and final regional report that was presented was the Asia Regional Report by Dr. Syed Nuruzzaman. He informed the meeting that robust growth was being replaced by growing uncertainty in Asian LLDCs, with falling commodity prices that was affecting Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Turkmenistan and rapid depreciation of currencies. He presented the current status of accession and implementation of international agreements with the Asian LLDCs, current regional and sub-regional initiatives on addressing transit barriers, including the CAREC Joint Customs programme and the ECE/ESCAP Electronic TIR Customs Transit System, and potential models and methodologies for control authorities. In terms of country results, he found that Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Nepal, Mongolia and Tajikistan have reduced time needed to complete international trade transactions, and Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have cut down the number of documents required for trade from 18 to 8 from 2006 to 2012.

Dr. Nuruzzaman continued his presentation by analysing the quality of the trade-transport infrastructure through the World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index, and found that even the best performing LLDCs of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were well below international standards. He then informed the meeting of current infrastructure development initiatives for the Asian LLDCs, including the Euro-Asian Transport Link and the Asian Highway Network. He then looked at recent trends in world trade, infrastructure requirements in the Asia-Pacific region, and sources for mobilizing investment resources, before concluding his presentation by providing policy options for the LLDCs, which included increased technical assistance, internationally supported capacity building, creating deeper linkages between their economies, and measures to identify transit and trade barriers.

Discussion: In the ensuing discussion, participants asked for clarification on when comments on the Draft Reports were due, to which mid-January was deemed as an acceptable deadline. Participants discussed the reasons why the LLDCs and the transit countries were not quickly ratifying the relevant conventions and regional agreements. These issues are captured under the discussion made on the legal framework below.

D. Legal Framework for Transit Cooperation at Bilateral, Regional, and Global levels

Mr. Artur Bouten made a presentation on the international perspectives of the legal framework on behalf of the ECE, in which he outlined the key role that border crossing facilitation plays in international trade, growth, competitiveness, and as a driver for regional integration. He said that crossing borders requires appropriate and resilient infrastructure, reliable and harmonized
international legal framework, harmonized or at least aligned procedures, and international cooperation and exchange of best practices. He detailed the TIR Convention of 1975, including the scope of the Convention, the pillars that it is founded upon, and the computerization process that is currently underway. Mr. Bouten concluded his presentation by discussing the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, TIR Green Lanes in Moldova, the Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings, and the Inland Clearance scheme in Afghanistan.

Following Mr. Bouten, Ms. Nora Neufeld presented the WTO’s perspective on the legal framework for transit cooperation, primarily discussing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. She first explained to the meeting how the WTO TFA promotes transit for LLDCs as a multilateral framework for transit facilitation. She stated that it has a common direction and convergence of reforms, a dispute settlement system, new enforcement perspectives, and provisions of particular relevance to LLDCs, such as strengthened non-discrimination provisions and improved guarantee systems. In terms of transparency, Ms. Neufeld informed the meeting that the TFA allows for increased access to information, reduced/simplified fees and formalities, expedited release and clearance of goods, and improved border agency cooperation. In terms of implementation, she informed the meeting that 57 countries have ratified the TFA, over half of the amount required for implementation, and that more are expected before the end of the year.

Mr. Igor Runov presented next on behalf of the IRU. He began by commenting on the slow rate of accession and ratification of existing trade facilitation agreements among LLDCs, and he agreed with the notion that this is due to the lack of awareness of the potential benefits of these agreements for acceding countries. He believed that “tried and tested” methods such as the TIR Convention may remedy this situation, and noted that the TIR has yielded positive impacts for countries that have ratified it. He endorsed the idea that progress on addressing gaps in the development of transport systems in LLDCs can be achieved by improving the legal framework for transit cooperation, and that this can be achieved by focusing on “low-hanging fruit” – or actions that do not require additional investments, but that can generate immediate benefits.

Underscoring the role of the private sector in assisting the LLDCs, he cited the Almaty and Vienna Programmes of Action that highlighted public-private partnerships and international cooperation as particularly important for promoting the development of transport and transit corridors to ensure sustainable development. Mr. Runov also noted that despite transportation not being singled out as an SDG, there is broad consensus on its importance to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. He reaffirmed IRU’s conviction that transport contributes significantly to development, and he concluded by assuring the meeting that the IRU stands ready to continue its engagement in these development processes.

With the international organisations completing their presentations, the regional organisations presented next. Mr. Maxwell Mkumba of SADC began by outlining what the SADC Regional Integration Agenda was founded on: model laws, policies, regulations and agreements; regional standards; guidelines; best practices; tripartite initiatives, bilateral agreements, and multilateral agreements. He then provided examples of specific legal instruments that SADC is responsible for, such as Regional Transport Corridors and One Stop Border Posts. In terms of achievements, he informed the meeting that almost all SADC Member States have acceded to the Kyoto Convention, an online mechanism for reporting and resolving NTBs, and the SADC Integrated
Regional Electronic Payment System. Furthermore, there has been capacity building in the form of Training the Trainer Programme, in which trainers are trained so that they develop their own training programmes for their own Member States, and use of international standards in order not to obstruct trade.

In his presentation, Mr. Bernard Dzawanda, representing COMESA, stated that the corridor framework remains an integral component of corridor strategy in the COMESA region, and in this regard, the COMESA Treaty acts as a compass, providing for the transit regulatory framework, development and application of transit transport facilitation instruments in the COMESA region. He informed the meeting that the COMESA Protocol on Transit Trade and Transit Facilities identifies the major transit transport facilitation instruments whose implementation has contributed positively on transit. He believed that national laws are also part of the legal framework for transit transport cooperation in the COMESA region given that COMESA does not have a legislative mandate, and as such depends on the domestication of regional agreements by Member States. He stated that most COMESA member countries are making an effort to implement regionally agreed instruments though to varying degrees, and through the Regional Integration Support Mechanism programme, which provides incentives for Member States to implement agreed regional integration instruments, COMESA can monitor the extent of these instruments.

Mr. Dzawanda continued by stating that implementation challenges are related to the slow pace of domestication, protectionist tendencies and capacity constraints of Member States, as well as weak enforcement mechanism on the part of COMESA. He informed the meeting that there are initiatives at the COMESA, EAC and SADC Tripartite Agreement to harmonize the Legal framework for transit transport cooperation in view of inter-REC trade flows, transit needs and overlapping membership to RECs, and that enhancing corridor management and encouraging the use of agreed instruments in line with COMESA Treaty remains key going into the future. He concluded by saying that harmonization at Tripartite level and leveraging on the Vienna Programme of Action will positively impact on LLDCs transit needs.

In his presentation, Mr. Ashoke Maliki, representing ECOWAS listed the relevant articles and protocols that act as the legal framework for ECOWAS, going into details on their history of ratification, amendment and implementation. He also discussed the Abidjan- Lagos Highway Development Programme, the relevant Joint Border Post legal framework, the current draft bilateral agreement between Nigeria and Cameroon, an operationalization manual for Joint Border Posts, and a Harmonised Axle Load legal framework.

**Discussion:** In the ensuing discussion, the meeting noted that there were supportive legal instruments at international and regional levels, however ratification by the LLDCs and transit countries was low and implementation was not fully effective. The major challenges faced by countries that were identified include: lack of awareness about the legal instruments and the potential benefits from ratification; lack of capacity; weak enforcement mechanisms; high turnover of experts and regulatory staff; and others. The meeting noted the need to support the LLDCs and transit countries in ratifying the relevant agreements. The meeting also noted the importance of undertaking studies that would show the benefits of the effective implementation of the legal instruments.
The meeting took note of the status of ratification of the TFA and the benefits associated with the full implementation of the TFA. They also discussed the benefits of some of the legal instruments including the TIR and Harmonization conventions. Participants stressed that full implementation of the legal instruments can generate substantial revenue for governments and for the private sector, and simultaneously create the conditions to advance national and regional efforts toward achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The meeting also noted that there were no specific provisions for LLDCs in the strategic framework of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). It was noted that the RECs have challenges of enforcing their own agreements. Some of the representatives of the LLDCs that were present shared their experiences on ratifying the key relevant international conventions and regional agreements.

E. Transit Infrastructure Development

In this session, international, regional, and national perspectives were presented on Transit Infrastructure Development. In his presentation, Mr. Poul Hansen, representing UNCTAD, outlined the current global transit issues and the importance of active National trade facilitation committees. He indicated that UNCTAD has extensive experience supporting national trade facilitation committees, and that UNCTAD strongly supports the efforts of Member States in acceding to and ratifying the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Furthermore, he cited UNCTAD’s over thirty years of experience with customs automation, and ASYCUDA, a program that provides expertise and powerful ICT tools to implement customs-related WTO TFA provisions.

Furthermore, Mr. Hansen stated that UNCTAD is an advocate for online portals on foreign trade procedures, including eRegulations, an online tool to help governments make rules and procedures fully transparent; and eRegistrations, a facility to traders for online tracking of their procedures through a single interface. He also informed the meeting that UNCTAD operates a TrainForTrade Programme, which supports developing countries to acquire efficiency and competitiveness, as well as providing complementary assistance to LLDCs with policy issues contributing to overall implementation of the TFA. Mr. Hansen concluded his presentation by advocating for the implementation of the TFA, further movement towards regional integration, improved transport and border infrastructure, and ICT.

In his presentation, Mr. Igor Runov of the IRU informed the meeting that the IRU is the only global organisation that advocates on behalf of road transport industry, with member associations in more than 100 countries. The IRU also administers the TIR Convention of 1975, and the IRU has facilitated the issuance of more than 3 million TIR carnets in 58 TIR operational countries. He indicated that the IRU believes that there are three priorities for transportation and transit: the Model Highway Initiative - an exemplary road section with modern, safe and convenient ancillary infrastructure that promotes regional integration; a regional approach to financing transport infrastructure; and “Blended Financing”, an innovative approach that combines concessional public finance with non-concessional private finance and expertise from both the public and private sector to finance transport infrastructure. Mr. Runov concluded his presentation by stating that such PPP schemes combine the strengths of partners by mobilising
private financing led by constructive regional, national and sub-national government policies and priorities for sustainable development.

Mr. Artur Bouten, representing the ECE, led off the presentations of the regional perspectives, focusing most of his discussions on ECE’s work in developing the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL). He highlighted the importance of such links in addressing growing trade between Asia and Europe and congestion of major ports, addressing infrastructure and border crossing obstacles, and fostering integration and cooperation in the region. He indicated that ECE conducted a joint study with ESCAP to examine results, conclusions and recommendations on how to proceed on EATL; they identified 9 road and 9 rail EATL routes for priority development, investment and cooperation, including EATL ports, trans-shipment points and terminals. The study also compared door-to-door transport scenarios time-wise and cost-wise, in five of the nine scenarios. Rail transport performed better than maritime for both cost and time, and in all nine scenarios, rail transport performs better than the maritime in terms of time.

Mr. Bouten outlined the current phase of EATL, the principle objective of which is to make the identified overland EATL rail and road routes operational. He said that International Financial Institutions and the relevant national infrastructure development bodies will be encouraged to direct their activities to coordinate infrastructure investment plans, as well as to attract private investment, and the ECE will be promoting coordination and facilitation of financing of infrastructural projects. Mr. Bouten concluded his presentation by discussing the Trans-European North-South Motorway and Trans-European Railway, stating that the TEM and TER Master Plans show the backbone for the road and rail networks with a realistic investment strategy for gradual development, and success will depend on the political will of countries as well as on the availability of national and international funding.

In his presentation, Mr. Ricardo J. Sánchez on behalf of ECLAC, highlighted the marginal participation of Bolivia and Paraguay in the IIRSA/COSIPLAN UNASUR portfolio, in which only 3.8% of total infrastructure investments went to Bolivia and 7.2% went to Paraguay. Furthermore, in the area of transport, the participation of LLDCs is marginal (only national projects, not considering bi-national and multinational projects): 2.7% of the total investments correspond for projects in Bolivia and 5.9% in Paraguay (3.8% and 7.2% respectively, if bi-national and multinational corridors are considered).

In his presentation, Mr. Maxwell Mkumba of SADC stated that one of the objectives of SADC’s trade and infrastructure development programmes is the harmonisation of strategies, policies, regulations, systems and standards. Furthermore, SADC is working towards ensuring that there is harmonization of road design standards, and standardization of axle load limits, vehicle weights and dimensions. He believed that harmonisation of modalities for infrastructure cost recovery is important, as is liberalisation and integration of regional markets for infrastructure services. He concluded by noting that building the necessary capacities for construction, maintenance and operation of regional infrastructure and services is very critical for the SADC Region, and that the issue of enhancing productive capacities is also critical for economic use of infrastructure.
Mr. Ashoke Maliki presented the perspective of ECOWAS on the issue of transit infrastructure development. He outlined current development projects that ECOWAS was undertaking, such as the Abidjan-Lagos Highway Development Programme, the Trans-Gambia Bridge, Rehabilitation of the Cotonou-Lome Road, and Joint Border Post Projects. He also discussed the ECOWAS Railway Master Plan, the objective of which is to enhance competitiveness of the economies in the region by providing affordable transport costs for agriculture and mining products and goods. The Master Plan consists of the rehabilitation of 3,300 km existing railways and the construction of 6,700 km of new lines. He concluded by saying that the next steps that ECOWAS will undertake is detailed feasibility studies, and funds mobilization.

**Discussion:** In the ensuing discussion, participants noted that the corridor approach to infrastructure development was proving to be successful. Examples of successful corridors were presented including the CAREC programme, and some of the corridors of the Trans African Highways. The meeting also noted the infrastructure development efforts in the Euro-Asia region including the Trans European North-South Motorway and Trans European Railways (TER) network and the project of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages. Member States also shared information about their efforts towards building transit infrastructure. The meeting noted the importance of ancillary infrastructure including the Model highway initiative.

The meeting discussed the issue of financing for transit infrastructure, which was found to be a major challenge, in particular resources to undertake feasibility studies and develop bankable projects. Participants stressed that the private sector’s investment efforts in infrastructure development are constrained by project development and there is need for more resources to be allocated to Project Preparation Process in order to attract financing.

The meeting noted the important role that the development partners have played in financing infrastructure development in LLDCs and underscored the need for enhanced support. Participants also noted the need for transboundary or regional approach to financing transport infrastructure and stressed the need for multilateral banks to provide resources towards the regional projects. The meeting also discussed new and innovative approaches to financing including use of sovereign wealth funds, infrastructure bonds and diaspora bonds. Participants discussed linking infrastructure development to the extractive sectors and stressed that LLDCs should negotiate in such a way to ensure that they will derive optimal benefit from such arrangements in the long term.

**F. LLDCs and International Trade, Trade Facilitation, Customs and Border Crossing Procedures**

In this session, international, and regional perspectives were presented on international trade, trade facilitation, customs and border crossing procedures. In her presentation, Ms. Nora Neufeld of the WTO stressed the importance of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. She indicated that trade acts as an engine for economic growth and development, and that the lowering of trade barriers, creation of new markets, and enhanced integration into world markets and global value chains helps achieve this goal. She reiterated to the meeting that the implementation of the TFA has the ability to reduce trade costs by an average of 15.4% for landlocked countries, and reduce time to import by over a day and a half and to export by two days. Furthermore, smaller firms are
more likely to export and increase their export shares than larger firms when time spent to clear exports is reduced. She informed the meeting that 76 Category A notifications have been received, 10 of which were from LLDCs and 13 from transit countries.

In his presentation, Mr. Toshiko Osawa of the WCO indicated that the WCO Mercator Programme and the WCO Transit Handbook supported the implementation of the VPoA and of the TFA. He also informed the meeting of the WCO’s capacity building efforts in 2015, which included a Regional Workshop on Transit in Uganda (16-19 February), a National Workshop on Transit in Azerbaijan (19-21 May), and a Workshop on Customs Transit for Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CLPL) countries in Mozambique (16-18 September). He announced that the WCO will open a new e-learning course for transit on the CLICK platform soon, and will develop a new guideline for transit, based on the Transit Handbook. Future capacity building efforts include a Global Transit Expert Accreditation Workshop in March, a Sub-regional Workshop on transit for Greater Mekong in April, and a Sub-regional Workshop on transit for South Asia, also in April 2016.

In his presentation, Mr. Puvan Selvanathan representing the ITC highlighted the ITC’s integrated trade facilitation program, which is focused on improving SMEs’ competitiveness for exports by using a holistic approach beyond the TFA through facilitating public-private dialogue in trade policy formulation, and collaborating with leading public and private trade facilitation agencies. His organisation’s research found that logistics costs represent up to 15% of product value, and that 63% of logistics costs consist of transport costs including border-crossing costs. He reiterated the notion that border inefficiencies translate into direct and indirect costs impacting on business competitiveness, and that SMEs are particularly vulnerable to these additional costs. Mr. Selvanathan informed the meeting of three salient features of the ITC’s Trade Facilitation Program: the promotion of business perspectives with a dedicated focus on SMEs, the promotion of stakeholder collaboration at the national and donor levels, and the promotion of regional approaches to the implementation of trade facilitation reforms.

Mr. Selvanathan believed that adopting regional approach to TFA facilitates transit flows is important because harmonization of practices and regulations along transit corridors creates a more transparent, predictable and conducive environment; economies of scale and sharing of resources can be best achieved when countries sharing a same corridor are coordinated; and in any transit corridor the overall performance is only as good as the weakest link. Furthermore, ITC promotes trade facilitation implementation in on-going initiatives to promote a coordinated approach to trade facilitation reforms in regional economic communities. Mr. Selvanathan concluded his presentation by stating that trade-related costs must be reduced; trade facilitation addresses border inefficiencies to reduce costs; trade facilitation is closely-linked to SME success in value chains; and trade facilitation is most effective when stakeholders coordinate and work together.

Mr. Ashoke Maliki presented the regional perspective of ECOWAS. He cited statistics that Joint Border posts have found to reduce average border crossing times to 3 hours, have halved clearance time for buses and passenger cars, dramatically reduced freight times, and have allowed for the possibility of pre-clearance of goods through information and equipment sharing. He also went into detail about the Abidjan Lagos Corridor Organization, which acts as a
transport observatory for ECOWAS. The observatory recently looked at the status of Computerized Single Window installations, goods/containers dwell time at the port, border crossing time of goods-loaded trucks, and number of road blocks per 100 km. It found that from 2013/14 to 2014/15, single window systems were installed, a decrease in dwell time between 1-3 days, drastically reduced dwell times and border crossing times for goods-loaded trucks, and a general decrease in the number of roadblocks drivers experienced.

In his presentation, Mr. Maxwell Mkumba of SADC informed the meeting that SADC has identified priority border posts at which One Stop Border Posts should be implemented, and they are actively encouraging enhanced cooperation by customs administrations in order to harmonize procedures and enhance flow of trade at border posts. In terms of outstanding issues, he highlighted the National Single Window Concept, Simplified Trade Regime for cross borders or the small trader, a Transit Management System, and the development of a SADC comprehensive trade facilitation programme.

Discussion: In the ensuring discussions, the meeting noted that the LLDCs incur the highest costs in the world for exporting and importing and stressed the need to improve trade facilitation in order to reduce these high costs. Participants discussed some of the initiatives to improve trade facilitation which include: COMESA Carrier License; COMESA Transit Plate which is given preferential treatment; Yellow Card; RCTG; COMESA Customs Document; harmonized Axle Load Limits; Vehicle Dimensions; One Stop Border Posts; Application of ICT (ASYCUDA, Single Window, COMESA Virtual Trade Facilitation System, etc.). The meeting noted that liberalization of visa requirements to improve movements and increase tourism (EAC UNIVISA, Rwanda Visa Policy visa liberalization) are very useful for example in East Africa and West Africa sub-region where they are being used widely.

The meeting noted the contribution of the private sector in trade facilitation. For example it was noted that ICF supported Senegal Customs Authority in the installation of GAINDe 2000 an electronic paperless administration system for cargo pre-clearance at Port of Dakar, and in Latin America, CONDESUR a private sector organisation that addresses trade facilitation issues and meets before MERCOSUR meetings. The meeting noted that a customs union eliminates unnecessary delays as evidenced by SACU and EAC regions. The meeting discussed the implementation of the TFA in particular the status of notification to category A Notifications.

The meeting also noted that coordination is a challenge – different ministries are responsible for different aspects on transit issues at the border. Participants stressed the need to improve coordination through mechanisms such as the national facilitation committee. The meeting also noted that SMEs are particularly vulnerable to the high trade costs associated with border inefficiencies and this severely affected their ability to trade. The meeting also noted that there was increased construction of one stop border posts or integrated borders. However participants noted that if there is no improved connectivity and use of ICTs, the time spent at the borders will not be improved.
G. Financing and Investment to Improve Transit for LLDCs

In her presentation, Ms. Nora Neufeld began by discussing the Mombasa Port in East Africa, which acts as a gateway to a consumer base of 200 million people, handling 30% of transit cargo and experiencing 11.5% related growth between 2013 and 2014. She then went into detail about trade facilitation reforms along the Northern Corridor in East Africa. Additionally, she cited examples of EAC reforms, which included establishment of One Stop Border Posts, introduction of a single customs territory, and computerization of clearance and electronic cargo tracking. The WTO found that these reforms led to reducing cost of doing business by 50% in the East African region. The time to move cargo from Mombasa to Kampala is now 4 days, down from 18, and the time for trucks to move from Mombasa to Kigali reduced from 21 days down to 3 days.

Ms. Neufeld continued by stating that improving border processing times reveals infrastructure capacity constraints elsewhere, such as the weak rail system leading to 95-96% modal load on road transport, affecting prices and thus consumers. She then listed infrastructure projects along the Northern Corridor, including construction of One Stop Border Posts, the Nairobi Outer Ring Road Upgrade, Northern Corridor Rehabilitation Programs, and Mombasa Port Development. Ms. Neufeld concluded by advocating for the TFA implementation, noting that while it will not only generate export gains between $750 billion to $1 trillion per annum, it provides a legal basis on which progress can be made that spurs continued reform. She stated that soft and hard infrastructure ideally go hand in hand, PPP can be very successful, and positive multipliers from TFA implementation can be maximized if accompanied by relevant infrastructure and services components.

In his presentation, Mr. Antonio Parenti, the representative of the EU informed the meeting that at the end of June this year, WTO members met in Geneva at the Fifth Global Review of Aid for Trade and identified lower trade costs as the number one focus in order to raise global prosperity and alleviate poverty, especially in the most vulnerable countries. This, he reasoned, is why the EU maintains its focus on trade facilitation, and why they will continue to support partner countries, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable to help them implement the TFA and to share in its positive impacts. He informed the meeting that the EU already runs many forms of trade facilitation technical assistance programmes, with Trade Facilitation often acting as a component of larger trade related assistance programmes, consisting of 30% of EU trade programmes. Furthermore, through the European Development Fund, the EU has long been supporting the development of strategic corridors in Africa. Over the past 10 years, investments resulted in more than 7,000 km of roads constructed or rehabilitated to stimulate inclusive growth at national and regional levels by connecting areas with high economic and agricultural potential and linking them to markets. The projects that the EU have supported include: the massive network of the North-South Corridor, the main transport route to supply the countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo; the Northern Corridor linking Kenya with Rwanda; and in the Western part of Africa, the strategic link between Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The EU is also supporting the development of integrated regional energy markets, for example through the Zambia-Tanzania-Kenya regional power interconnector. To further enhance interconnectivity, EU future cooperation will encompass both investments and support to such governance reforms that impede investments to yield.
The EU representative informed the meeting that the European Commission has committed EUR 122m for the Northern Corridor Road improvement project Mbarara-Ntungamo (total cost EUR 167m). The overall project objective is to reduce transport costs and travel time as well as to improve road safety on the Northern Corridor route in Uganda. This will promote economic and social development and facilitate international and transit trade and thereby boost regional integration. The specific objective is to contribute to developing a safe and sustainable national road network by improving, rehabilitating and strengthening the Mbarara - Katuna (Rwandan border) section of the Northern Corridor route. He concluded by saying that as the Northern Corridor links Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda as well as Southern Sudan to the Kenyan seaport of Mombasa, it carries a significant volume of domestic, transit and passenger traffic.

In his presentation, Mr. Guillaume Delalande from the OECD provided information on the OECD DAC’s work on financing to LLDCs, in the context of the DAC HLM of December 2014, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He took stock of funding trends to the LLDCs, showing that trends in concessional finance to the LLDCs have not particularly favoured Landlocked Developing countries since the Millennium declaration in comparison to all developing countries. He indicated that when looking at the composition of financing to LLDCs, data show that Landlocked Developing countries are heavily dependent on concessional financing compared to developing countries in general. Support to LLDCs still largely takes the form of grants. He suggested that there is a need to step up efforts towards LLDCs as part of the 2030 Agenda and that these efforts should better target the most relevant sectors, in particular economic infrastructure, taking into account the LLDC’s specific development challenges.

In his presentation on regional perspectives, Mr. Maxwell Mkumba representing SADC highlighted some proposed financing mechanisms for infrastructure development in SADC, underscoring the notion that innovative financing means are required to accelerate implementation of programmes, projects, and initiatives. He informed the meeting that SADC set up a Project Preparation and Development Facility for packaging projects to bankability, a SADC Development Fund was set up to fund, among others, infrastructure development projects, and that SADC will also continue to explore Alternative Sources of Funding, which include working on the Modalities for Cost Recoveries.

Mr. Bernard Dzawanda, representing COMESA, indicated that financing of hard infrastructure has remained predominantly a responsibility of governments. Road Funds and Road Development Agencies contribute significantly towards road infrastructure development and maintenance. COMESA actively mobilizes resources from development partners who have financed project preparation through grants. He informed the meeting that some countries have borrowed on their own to finance infrastructure development, and that China has dominated the construction of roads and rail by providing funding and undertaking actual construction like the Djibouti-Ethiopia standard gauge railway line, Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway, the Lamu port, among others. Furthermore, Kenya and Zambia issued infrastructure bonds to raise funds for development and maintenance of roads and rail among other infrastructure classes. He applauded development partners like DFID, European Union, World Bank and African Development Bank who each have supported infrastructure developments of the North South Corridor, with the EU emphasizing blending of financial resources for infrastructure
development. He concluded by saying that the trans-boundary nature of regional infrastructure calls for an innovative funding model and proper coordination to subordinate national to regional priorities.

Discussion: In the ensuing discussion, the meeting noted that member states themselves provided funding for infrastructure development through contributions. Representatives of the LLDCs that were present noted that they have been trying to create a favourable environment for enabling private sector investment in infrastructure, however they indicated that some of the challenges that they face include shortage of skilled manpower and resources for feasibility studies. The meeting stressed the importance of technical support to LLDCs and transit countries for developing bankable projects. Participants also underscored the need for sharing of experiences between the countries.

Participants discussed innovative sources of funding and noted that some countries such as Kenya and Zambia had offered infrastructure bonds. The other source of funding were road tolls or levies which were used to resource the road funds and road development agencies. It was noted that in the COMESA region road funds had not made good progress as much as the West Africa region and that they were going to undertake a study on the use of road funds. The meeting also noted that financing itself was not a problem but accessing the funds with bankable projects was the major problem.

H. Recommendations for improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs

The following recommendations/suggestions were derived from the presentations and the discussions in the meeting.

Legal Framework for Transit cooperation

- Relevant UN systems, international, regional and other organizations should provide joint capacity-building assistance to LLDCs and transit countries with respect to the relevant international legal instruments, including training programmes for all stakeholders, to raise awareness and understanding of the process and implications of accession to international conventions, regional and sub-regional agreements relating to transit facilitation and transport.
- Prepare guidelines or toolkits to support LLDCs to ratify and implement legal instruments.
- The private sector should be involved at all stages in the development of transport and trade legal instruments, including the conceptual stage; this will improve its ownership and willingness to support the implementation of these instruments.
- Member States should try to raise awareness on these legal instruments through resolutions; it is also important to translate resolutions to the language that the countries can understand.
- Landlocked developing countries should try to integrate their special needs at sub-region and regional levels.
The RECs and regional organizations are encouraged to mainstream the VPoA into their work programme as called for by the VPoA.

African countries should put special emphasis on implementing the REC Protocols on Free Movement of persons – which have stalled.

Early ratification and subsequent implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement is very important.

The LLDCs should make greater use of WTO TFA by filing necessary notifications to get technical assistance.

Political will is very important for the ratification and also implementation.

UN-OHRLLS should work on indicators with the High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Development and present this work on transit issues to the upcoming meeting in Washington DC.

Transit Infrastructure Development

- Continue infrastructure Development through Corridor Development Approach (Experience in LLDCs of East and Southern Africa and Asia’s CAREC Region).
- Adopt a regional approach in infrastructure development; multilateral and regional development banks and other development partners should consider supporting such regional infrastructure projects.
- There is need to provide LLDCs and their transit countries with comprehensive and long term capacity building support in order to help them develop bankable projects and design public policies that can support sustainable infrastructure investments.
- LLDCs and their transit neighbours should aim to enhance domestic resource mobilization and prioritize resource allocation towards infrastructure development.
- LLDCs with abundant natural resources should consider leveraging their natural resources wealth to attract foreign investment or using the resource rents for investments in basic infrastructure.
- Prioritize development of ancillary infrastructure.
- Involvement of the leadership is important as shown by the examples from the NEPAD PICI Programme in Africa.
- Promote the involvement of private sector in particular through PPPs.
- Explore new and innovative approaches to financing including use of sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, infrastructure bonds and diaspora bonds; innovative forms of financing instruments such as the Africa50 Fund and the Africa Growing Together Fund should be scaled up.

Trade Facilitation, Customs and Border Crossing Procedures

- Countries should make greater use of ICT systems (ASYCUDA, Single Windows, etc.)
- Countries are encouraged to stop use of customs convoy.
- There should be greater push towards customs union or CFTA in order to allow for freer and faster movement in transit.
- Greater efforts should be made to achieve Free Movement of persons.
- Establish or strengthen national trade facilitation committees.
- Regional approach to trade facilitation is important.
- There is need to raise awareness of the VPoA among the customs officials.
Financing and Investment to Improve Transit for LLDCs

- There is need to step up efforts to increase Official Development Assistance support for the LLDCs which should be leveraged, as appropriate, to attract additional financing for infrastructure development, to make loans more affordable for many LLDCs.
- Development assistance to LLDCs should be targeted to those sectors that are most in need such as infrastructure development.
- It is important for Aid-For-Trade or other forms of support to provide more support targeted towards project preparation of bankable projects.
- South-South and triangular cooperation is very important and needs to be strengthened.
- A stronger role of the private sector is crucial, including through public-private partnerships, in providing investment in transport infrastructure development and maintenance and through instruments like infrastructure bonds.
- Governments should create enabling environments for the private sector to play an enhanced role.

Recommendations to Enhance the Reports;

- The global report should include a detailed discussion of the VPoA in the first chapter.
- On trade facilitation, the global report should consult the OECD and WTO reports referred to in the meeting and the new ranking on trading across borders presented in the meeting prepared by the World Bank in the Doing Business Report.
- Ensure that reports indicate that the delays and costs at the border are not only related to customs formalities but by other operations at the border.
- ASYCUDA is not being used in all African countries.
- The chapter on infrastructure development of the global report is 'silent' on the soft side and in addressing sector inefficiencies that have to go together with the investments; it is thus suggested to also add the soft angle in this chapter.
- There is no reference to the notion of "lacking project preparation" which is considered as one of the bottlenecks in order to attract partners, particularly project financiers and the private sector.
- In view of integrating the climate change agenda and the bearings of the SDGs, recommendations should not leave out the issue of developing resilient infrastructure, promoting low-carbon solutions and road safety.
I. Way forward

The meeting agreed on the following way forward.

- Key issues raised in the meeting should be taken into account in finalizing the global report and the 3 regional reports;
- Present the global report to the meeting of the High-level panel on sustainable transport in the beginning of 2016; and
- Experts should submit to the Secretariat their comments as soon as possible, latest by 15 January 2016 so that the reports can be finalized within the first quarter of 2016.
Annex I: List of Participants

**Member States**

**Afghanistan**
Mr. Marco Bassano, Mission of Afghanistan, Email: mbassano@afghanistan.un.org

**Armenia**
Ms. Sofya Simonyan, Second Committee Expert of Mission of Armenia, Email: s.simonyan@mfa.am

**Azerbaijan**
Ms. Hana Kharim Ibrahimova, Counsellor of Mission of Azerbaijan, Tel: 646-610-1660, Email: hanum.mfa@gmail.com

**Benin**
Mr. Zinsou Erick, Counsellor of Mission of Benin, Tel: 646-288-7431, Email: zinsouerick@yahoo.fr

**Bhutan**
Mr. Karma Choeda, Mission of Bhutan, Tel: 917-754-4601, Email: karmachoeda@pmbny.bt

**Bolivia**
Iara Beekma, Mission of Bolivia, Tel: 917-591-6752, Email: beekmia@gmail.com

**Botswana**
Mr. Tlhalefo B. Madisa, Mission of Botswana, Email: batsmadisa@gmail.com

**Burkina Faso**
Mr. Konate Ounibani, Mission of Burkina Faso, Email: ouinibani@yahoo.fr

**China**
Mr. Zhang Yanhua, Mission of China, Tel: 917-794-6343, Email: zhangyanhua@mofam.gov.cn

**Kazakhstan**
Aigerim Bozzhigitova. First Secretary of Mission of Kazakhstan, Tel: 917-436-8615, Email: abozz.un.kz@gmail.com

**Italy**
Mr. Franco Boschetti, Mission of Italy, Email: intern4.italyun@esteri.it

**Lesotho**
Mr. Kamohelo Phenithi, Mission of Lesotho, Tel: 212-661-1690, Email: phenithik@yahoo.com

Mr. Qenehelo Tsokeli, Counsellor of Foreign Affairs of Mission of Lesotho, Tel: +26663055890, Email: genehelo@hotmail.com

**Malawi**
Ms. Chrissie Mahuka, First Secretary of Mission of Malawi, Tel: 914-305-0607, Email: chrissie.mahuka@gmail.com
Mongolia
Mr. Bat-Erdene Chinuukhi, Counsellor of Mission of Mongolia, Tel: 347-824-4222,
Email: chinuukei2012@gmail.com

Nepal
Ms. Illa Mainali, Second Secretary of Mission of Nepal, Email: mainali ila@hotmail.com
Mr. Lok Bahadur Poudel Chhetri, Second Committee Expert of Mission of Nepal, Tel: 917-900-7880,
Email: lokbpc@mofa.gov.np

Niger
Mr. Laouali Labo, Mission of Niger, Tel: 917-228-2032, Email: laoualilabo@yahoo.fr

Paraguay
Mr. Marcelo Scappini, Mission of Paraguay
Mr. Enrique Carrilo, Mission of Paraguay, Tel: 718-885-6153, Email: enri.nyc@gmail.com

Russia
Ms. Irina Medvedeva, Senior Counsellor of Mission of Russia, Email: irina.medvedeva.00@inbox.ru

Swaziland
Mr. Siphelele Dludlu, Counsellor of Mission of Swaziland, Tel: 646-667-8269,
Email: siphelele_dludlu@yahoo.co.uk

Togo
Mr. Peketi Ptangme, Mission of Togo, Tel: 646-247-5623, Email: peketifirmin@gmail.com

Turkey
Ms. Defne Erdal, Mission of Turkey, Email: defne.erdal@mfa.gov.tr
Ms. Ceren Ozgur, Mission of Turkey, Tel: 917-216-8156, Email: ctuna@mfa.gov.tr

United States
Ms. Christina Aguila, Mission of United States, Email: aguilact@state.gov

Zambia
Ms. Theresah L. Chanda, Economic Counsellor of Mission of Zambia, Tel: 212-888-5770,
Email: theresanachanda@gmail.com
Mr. Kaswamu Katota, First Secretary of Mission of Zambia, Email: chiskatota@gmail.com
Experts and International and Regional Organisations

Dr. Robert Okello, Director of Lyciar LTD., Uganda, Tel: +256777193498, Email: Robert.okello@lyciar.com

Ms. Maria Florencia Millan-Placci, Expert for Latin America Regional Report, Tel: +549261255610, Email: florenciamillan@gmail.com

Mr. Syed Nuruzzaman, Development Economist, Tel: 66870568274, Email: syed.unbkk@yahoo.com

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
Mr. Bernard Dzawanda, Senior Transport Economist, Tel: +260978829149, Email: bdzwanda@comesa.int

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
Mr. Ashone Maliki, Road Infrastructure Safety Expert, Tel: +2347032347320, Email: amaliki@ecowas.int

European Union (EU)
Mr. Antonio Parenti (Head of the EU 2C Team), Email: Antonio.PARENTI@eeas.europa.eu

Ms. Munia El Harti, Adviser to European Union Delegation, Email: munia.el.alonso@gmail.com

Leonessa Crisci, Intern/Trade and Development Adviser, Tel: 6465209984, Email: leonessa.crisci@eeas.europa.eu

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)
Dr. Louise Kantrow, Tel: 212-703-5042, Email: louise.kantrow@iccwbo.org

International Road Union (IRU)
Mr. Igor Runov, Under-Secretary-General, New York, Email: Igor.Runov@iru.org

International Trade Centre (ITC)
Mr. Puvan Selvanathan, Head of ITC Office to UN, Tel: 917 515 9959, Email: selvanathan@intracen.org

Ms Huah Xiao, Tel: 212-906-6399, Email: xiao@intracen.org

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Ms Kadiatou Sall-beye, Officer for LDCs, ITU Liaison Office to the United Nations DC2-2524, 2 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-4403 Tel: +1 917 367 4701, Email: sall-beye@un.org, kadiatou.sall-beye@itu.int
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
Guillaume Delalande, Policy Analyst, DCD/SDF, Development Architecture and Global Governance, 2, rue André Pascal - 75775 Paris Cedex 16, Tel: +33 1 45 24 94 72, Email: guillaume.delalande@oecd.org

Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)
Mr. Abdulrahman Olhaye, Programme Officer, Tel: 917-367-7069, Email: olhaye@un.org
Mr. Ben Idrissa Ouedraogo, Tel: 1-917-3673068, Email: ouedraogob@un.org

Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO)
Ms. Daniela Simioni, Tel: 1-917-367-2003, Email: simioni@un.org

Southern African Development Community (SADC)
Mr. Maxwell Mkumba, Senior Policy Research Advisor, Tel: +26777195900, Email: mmkumba@sadc.int

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)
Mr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, Tel: 977-1-4444438, Email: posh.pandey@sawtee.org

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
Ms. Saeko Kajima, Associate Expert on Sustainable Development, Tel: 212-963-5924, Email: kajima@un.org
Ms. Ling Wang, Sustainable Development Officer, Tel: 212-9630727, Email: wang24@un.org
Ms. Hui Hua, Sustainable Economic Development Expert, Email: hua@un.org

UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Mr. Soteri Gatera, Chiefs, Industrialization and Infrastructure Section, Tel: +251115445449, Email: sgatera@uneca.org

UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
Mr. Artur Bouten, Legal Officer, Sustainable Transport Division, Tel: +41229172433, Email: artur.bouten@unece.org

UN Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (ECLAC)
Mr. Ricardo J. Sanchez, Active Director, Natural Resources and Infrastructure Division, Tel: +562 2210 2257, Email: ricardo.sanchez@eclac.org

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
Mr. Poul Hansen, Division on Technology and Logistics, Tel: 41 22 917 3258, Email: poul.hansen@unctad.org
Ms. Isabel Garza Rodriguez, Economic Affairs officer, Email: garzai@un.org
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Ms. Eunice Kamwendo, Strategic Advisor, Tel: +19172409200, Email: eunice.kamwendo@undp.org

United National Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
Mr. Ralf Bredel, Senior Liaison Officer, Tel: 917-367-4884, Email: r.bredel@unido.org

Mr. Hiroyuki Ozaki, Expert, Email: ozaki@un.org

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Mr. Kazi A. Rahman, Deputy Special Representative to the United Nations, Tel: (914) 552-6255, Email: Afzal.kazi@gmail.com

World Bank (WB)
Mr. Nicholas Bian, International Affairs Officer, Tel: 202-290-5093, Email: nbian@worldbank.org

World Customs Organization (WCO)
Mr. Toshihiko Osawa, Technical Officer, Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, Tel: +32 (0) 2209 9657, Email: toshihirosoawa@wcoomd.org

World Trade Organization (WTO)
Ms. Nora Neufeld, Counsellor Secretary of the Preparatory Committee on Trade Facilitation, Tel: +417 9910 1823, Email: nora.neufeld@wto.org

UN-OHRLLS Secretariat
Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, UN-OHRLLS,

Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, Policy Development, Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, UN OHRLLS, E-mail: erdenebileg@un.org

Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, Email: mutangadura@un.org

Mr. David Chapman, Intern, United Nations Secretariat, 405 East 42nd Street, Room S-3245, New York, NY 10017, Tel: 212-963-3316, Email: ohrllsguest2@un.org
**Annex II: Agenda**

Expert Group Meeting on Improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs

10 and 11 December 2015

**PROGRAMME OF WORK**

| DAY 1 – Thursday, 10 December 2015 | 2:30 pm -3:00 pm | **Session 1.** Importance of Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs in the context of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and Addis Ababa Action Agenda  
• Introduction of the objectives of the meeting and welcome remarks by Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. |
| | 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm | **Session 2.** Presentation of the draft reports  
• Global Report by Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UN OHRLLS,  
• Africa Regional Report by Dr. Robert Okello  
• Latin America Regional Report by Ms. Maria Florencia Millan Placci  
• Asia Regional Report by Dr. Syed Nuruzzaman |
| | 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm | **Session 3.** Legal Framework for Transit transport cooperation at bilateral, regional; and global levels  
• International perspectives: ECE, WTO, UNCTAD, IRU  
• Regional perspectives: SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, Dr. Posh Pandey (Asia)  
• National perspectives by the LLDCs |

**Interactive Discussion**

| DAY 2 – Friday, 11 December 2015 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm | **Session 4.** Transit Infrastructure Development  
• International perspectives: UNCTAD, IRU  
• Regional perspectives: ECE, ECLAC, Dr. Posh Pandey (Asia), SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS  
• National perspectives by the LLDCs |
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<td><strong>Session 5. LLDCs and International Trade and Trade Facilitation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LUNCH BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>4:00 pm – 5:00 pm</td>
<td><strong>Session 6. Financing and Investment to improve transit for LLDCs</strong></td>
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<td>5:00 pm – 6:00 pm</td>
<td><strong>Session 7. Recommendations for improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs</strong></td>
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