STATEMENT BY
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AT THE
SEMINAR ON IMPORTANCE OF KEY TRADE AND
TRANSPORT CONVENTIONS

9 May 2016, 10:00 am -13:00 pm,
Conference Room 1, UNHQ
Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Undersecretary General for this collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) to organize this important seminar for us to discuss the crucial matters at the heart of the key priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing countries as well as for the related Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the Agenda 2030. I am pleased that this seminar has been called to look at ways in which we will advance the ratification and implementation of key international conventions to facilitate transit transport and trade.

As a group of Landlocked developing countries in particular, it is important to discuss the pragmatic ways of implementing our set priorities and targets for transit policy issues, international trade and trade facilitation. This is critical time for all of us to collectively align our plans and actions at National, Regional and Global levels. We need to walk the talk, especially together with our transit countries and development partners in strengthening partnership and increased support to the key actions of the programme of action in all the regions and in all the LLDCs.

Excellences,

Fundamental transit policy issue is the first priority area of the Vienna Programme of Action and aims to reduce travel time along corridors and to significantly reduce the time spent at borders, as well as improving inter-modal
connectivity. The Programme of Action calls for harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules and documentation.

International conventions on transit transport and trade are the main vehicles by which the harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules and documentation can be achieved. There are over 50 UN conventions on international transport and trade facilitation.

Some of the key conventions of importance to the LLDCs Group include the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR¹ Carnets, the Customs Convention of Containers and the Revised Kyoto Customs Convention. It is critical that not only LLDCs, but also transit countries ratify and implement these conventions, as called for in the VPoA.

Regional integration and cooperation, in particular on transit issues, is important for enhancing trade facilitation and physical integration of the LLDCs. The more countries in the respective regions become party to the important conventions, the more widespread benefits will all countries experience.

I am particularly happy to see that H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of LLDCs, is here with us today. We hope that the Group of Friends of LLDCs will support and assist us and the transit countries in this endeavor.

Being a party to these conventions has important benefits. The conventions provide the regulatory framework for more efficient border and customs controls, simplified procedures, faster transport and trade facilitation.

¹TIR stands for; Transports Internationaux Routiers” or “International Road Transports".
This will lower trade and transport costs and fewer delays at borders, which will lead to more trade. This is one of the ultimate goals of LLDCs: to increase our exports and integrate more into the global trading system.

Since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2003, the predecessor to the Vienna Programme of Action, notable progress has been made in reviewing regulatory frameworks applicable to transit transport and trade to eliminate inefficiencies and non-physical barriers to cross-border transport and to improve connectivity. Furthermore, as LLDCs, we have increased harmonization of transport and transit policies, laws, procedures and practices with transit countries.

Overall, however, the status of accession to these key international conventions is low. For example, while African LLDCs have been doing relatively well in ratifying the revised Kyoto convention on customs, accession to the Harmonization Convention and the TIR conventions has been very low. The TIR convention is implemented mainly in Europe and Asia, however it has been said numerous times that it can be widely applicable and should be implemented by African LLDCs and transit countries to speed up transport over the Africa continent.

The harmonization convention also has limited membership from LLDCs and transit countries, despite providing important provisions for coordinated border management that would greatly speed up our transit transport. There is great need to step up efforts, awareness and necessary capacity enhancement to support wider application and implementation for the benefit
of all member states, to reduce the inequalities between regions and countries.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement is also of critical importance for LLDCs. The Agreement aims to ensure faster, smoother and cheaper trade across borders. It is therefore critical for LLDCs, in view of the high trade costs that they face. Out of the 77 countries that have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, 8 are LLDCs and 12 are transit countries. This is a very good sign, but I would like to urge all of you to undertake the necessary domestic process to ratify the Agreement and pave the way for others. I wish to state that Zambia, as well as four other African LLDCs have already ratified it.

The Treaty Event, which will take place during the next session of the General Assembly in September, provides us with a high profile opportunity to deposit our instruments of accession or ratification with the Secretary-General and to lead by example.

As I Conclude, I would also like to call on you to work to ratify the Multilateral Agreement on the International Think Tank on the LLDCs. The Think Tank has an important role to play in conducting research and analyzing and sharing of lessons learned amongst LLDCs. Five more countries need to ratify the agreement in order for the Think Tank to become fully operational.

I thank you for this opportunity, and look forward to very fruitful discussions and a successful seminar.

I thank you for your attention.