Mr. Chairman, His Excellency Minister of Public Works and Human Settlement of Bolivia
Under Secretary-General and High Representative of OHRLLS
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is indeed a pleasure to be here in the beautiful city of Santa Cruz to participate in this High Level Meeting on Sustainable Transport of Landlocked Developing Countries.

2. I wish to express my delegation’s sincere appreciation to our host, the government and people of Bolivia for their warm hospitality and for the excellent arrangements that have been made for this meeting.

3. I wish to also thank Under Secretary-General and High Representative of OHRLLS for his steadfast support and advocacy on behalf of the LLDCs. His team at OHRLLS also deserves our appreciation for their contributions and support to the successful convening of this meeting.

Mr. Chairman

4. We meet following the adoption of a series of landmark global agreements that unequivocally recognized the special needs and challenges of the landlocked developing countries.

5. The Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries, adopted in 2014, sets out a 10-year blueprint for sustainable development of LLDCs and underscores the commitment of the global community to support landlocked developing countries. Priority 2 of the Vienna Programmes of Action aptly summarizes the importance of infrastructure development within the LLDCs.

6. Last year, we adopted the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda that also recognized the special needs of the landlocked developing countries and stressed the need for a special focus on LLDCs.
7. The adoption of these milestone agreements, I believe, present good opportunities for LLDCs to advance our cause in further garnering the support of the international community towards addressing their special needs and challenges.

8. The theme and objective of the high level meeting—how to build sustainable transport in landlocked developing countries goes at the heart of addressing the fundamental and inherent structural constraints that LLDCs face - how to improve connectivity and turn ourselves from landlocked to land-linked countries.

Mr. Chairman

9. Development of infrastructure continues to remain a priority for Bhutan. In the current, 11th Five Year Plan, Infrastructure Development is one of the strategic focus areas in addition to inclusive social development and accelerated green economic development.

10. Development of transport system forms an integral part of our overall infrastructure development strategy. In the last 50 years, Bhutan has progressed from a closed pastoral society with no electricity and no roads into country that is making good economic progress.

11. Given our challenging topography, road transport is the principal mode of transport. From literally no roads in 1960s, we have today more than 11000 kms of road connecting the various districts of Bhutan.

12. Two airlines operate currently to ten destinations in five countries. Helicopter service was launched in 2015 mainly to provide services on demand including emergency, forest fires and medical evacuation.

13. Massive road network expansion program, especially to provide access to remote areas is currently underway.

14. We have launched the Bhutan Electric Vehicle Initiative that aims to move towards more environmentally friendly technology. Piloting of electric buses is in the pipeline through the GEF assistance. Similar support to replace fossil fuel operated taxis by electric cars is also in the pipeline.

15. On the policy side, UNDP is assisting Bhutan to draw up an Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Policy.

16. Studies are also being undertaken to introduce Light Railway between Paro and the Capital City. Discussion on connecting the border town of Phuntsholing with railway connectivity is under way.
17. A pre-feasibility study for a mass transit system for the National Capital Region has been completed by UNCRD and DESA. While we await the final report, preliminary indications are very encouraging. But detailed consideration would be required given the high capital required to take on this project.

18. While Bhutan has benefitted from its membership to the AH network, Bhutan has not yet gained membership to Trans-Asian Railway and Dry Port.

19. All these initiatives at the national level have improved connectivity within Bhutan and with the outside world.

20. However, high cost of construction and maintenance continue to provide huge constraints. PPP projects in the transport sector have found to be not feasible due to low user base. We continue to face lack of intermodal transport infrastructure, such as dry ports, warehouse facilities and cold storage.

21. Despite these challenges, we continue to undertake efforts to develop a sustainable transport system, recognizing its important role for our socio-economic development as well as for disaster response and management.

Mr. Chairman

22. Going forward, it is vitally important that LLDCs continue to mainstream the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda in their development plans. Bhutan is currently preparing for the 12th Five Year Plan and will work towards integrating the VPOA and the SDGs into our development plans and programmes. Realisation of SDG 9 on Infrastructure and Development and Priority 2 of the VPOA are absolutely critical.

23. Building synergies between these two-landmark agreements are also critical to ensure that we implement them in a coherent and integrated manner.

24. Needless to mention that for LLDCs, implementing the VPOA and 2030 Agenda and particularly on building infrastructure and sustainable transport would require the continued support of development partners, including bilateral as well as the UN development system and multilateral banks. Without adequate financial and technical support, it is just not possible for LLDCs to realize its infrastructures development needs given the capital-intensive nature of the projects.

25. At the global level, we must ensure that there is adequate follow up and monitoring of the LLDCs.

26. The development of indicators framework for LLDCs would be a useful tool to take stock of progress made by LLDCs in the different priority areas.
27. The high level political forum is a good forum to do this and LLDCs must work towards participating annually in the national voluntary reviews, which in our view, helps to highlight the challenges of LLDCs.

28. The Group must also continue to follow developments on the Global Infrastructure Forum in order to add our voice and ensure that the Forum addresses the needs of LLDCs.

29. The upcoming Global Conference on Sustainable Transport offers a good opportunity for LLDCs to enhance their voice and visibility, building on the momentum from this meeting. LLDCs must work towards an active and collective participation in the Global Conference in Turkmenistan this November.

30. In closing, Mr. Chairman, the need for developing a sustainable transport system is, in our view, is critical to help LLDCs not only address a fundamental problem of connectivity, but also to help them achieve greater economic growth and prosperity. We must therefore continue in our national as well as collective endeavors. There is good level of support and solidarity from the international community as reflected in the important agreements over the past two years. We must seize this opportunity to further advance our cause in coming months and years ahead.

I thank you.

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