Opening remarks

By

H.E. Honourable Harry Kalaba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia, Chair of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries

At the

Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries

New York, 20 September 2017
Honorable Ministers,
Excellency Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations; Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute, Columbia University;
H.E. Mr. Munkh-Orgil Tsend, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia;
Excellency Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under Secretary General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States;
Mr. Tegegnework Gettu, Under-Secretary-General and Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Excellences,
Distinguished delegates

At the outset, on behalf of the LLDCs and on my own behalf, I would like to express our gratitude to the Deputy Secretary General for finding time to attend our meeting on behalf of the Secretary General. Your presence demonstrates the continued commitment and support to the LLDCs.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate Her Excellency Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu on her appointment as the new Under Secretary General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. I also wish to convey through you our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Gyan Chandra Acharya who during his tenure had tirelessly worked for this group in that capacity.
Excellences, Distinguished delegates,

I wish to welcome you all to the Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries being held under the theme “Accelerating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” This meeting offers us an opportunity to regularly review our progress in implementing the key development agendas in particular the Vienna Programme of Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement, amongst others. It also provides an opportunity to identify challenges faced by the LLDCs in achieving sustainable development as well as the opportunity to agree on common positions and actions to address the challenges. It further gives us the opportunity to discuss emerging global issues of particular importance to the LLDCs. To this end, your attendance is important and most appreciated to identify the LLDC challenges, to agree on common positions and to discuss the relevant emerging global issues.

Excellences, Distinguished delegates,

Three years into the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action the LLDCs still face major obstacles to development. The social and economic development of the LLDCs as measured by the Human Development Index shows that developmental challenges continue to persist in most of the LLDCs. On average the LLDCs Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.57 in 2015 and only six LLDCs were ranked among countries with a high HDI.

The LLDCs also face high transport and trade costs and as such their exports remain uncompetitive in the global market. Our share of global exports remains low and has been on the decline. In addition, the LLDCs still mainly export
commodities with very low value addition and technology content. Given the volatility of the commodity prices, the LLDCs economies remain vulnerable. This situation shows that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development principle of leaving no one behind and its’ overarching objective eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty would require enhancing targeted interventions in the LLDCs. The theme for today’s meeting is very relevant given the situation of the LLDCs. This meeting is therefore expected to come up with actions and measures necessary to accelerate the implementation of these key development agendas.

As we get close to the comprehensive high-level mid-term review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, we need to seriously reflect on the innovative and effective ways by which we can further accelerate development in the LLDCs in order to achieve the SDGs and leave no one behind.

Excellences, Distinguished delegates,

While the development and progress of our countries remain our responsibility, partnerships remain fundamental for the achievement of meaningful progress in LLDCs. The LLDCs are faced with competing developmental needs and challenges but have very limited resources. Partnerships at all levels - global, regional, national and local - including with the transit countries, development partners, international organizations, international financial organizations and the private sectors need to be enhanced. It also remains important that the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are mainstreamed in development programmes at all levels to facilitate implementation.
The entry into force of the Agreement on the establishment of the International Think Tank for LLDCs on 6 October 2017 will be a very significant achievement for the LLDCs. In this regard, I would like to thank the Member States who have ratified the Agreement thus bringing it into force. This is a true demonstration of their commitment to the cause of addressing the challenges faced by the LLDCs. We now look forward to the speedy formalization of the International Think Tank for LLDCs.

I also thank the Government of Mongolia for the tremendous support it continues to give to the operations of the Think Tank and we look forward to your continued commitment. I would also like to invite all the relevant UN agencies, development partners, relevant regional and international organizations to support the Think Tank so that it can achieve its mandate. More ratifications of the Agreement on the establishment of the International Think Tank for LLDCs are also necessary to strengthen its operations. It is in this regard that I call on all the LLDCs who have not ratified the Agreement of the International Think Tank for the LLDCs to do so at their earliest convenience.

Excellences, Distinguished delegates,

This year also marked the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement is recognized as the key legal instrument which can address the high trade costs faced by the LLDCs. Its expeditious implementation is therefore important for the integration of the LLDCs into the global trade and achieving sustainable development. I further encourage the LLDCs as well as the transit countries that have not ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement to do so and I also call for
enhanced support to the LLDCs and transit countries to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement.

In concluding my statement let me express on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Zambia our profound thanks to you all for the kind support extended to us throughout its tenure as Chair of the Group.

I thank you.