

IMPROVING COOPERATION ON TRANSIT, TRADE FACILITATION AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



UN-OHRLS

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL EURO-ASIA REGIONAL
MEETING HELD IN HA NOI, VIET NAM, 7-9, MARCH 2017.

NOTE

This publication contains a summary report of the High-Level Euro-Asia Regional Meeting on Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 9-7, March 2017.

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EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY

Effective co-operation of the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and transit developing countries is crucial for their effective participation in international and regional trade and sustainable development. The 32 LLDCs face development challenges owing to their geographical disadvantage of lacking territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets. They account for 0.9 per cent of global exports, lack export diversification, have limited participation in Global Value Chains, and high trade costs. There are 34 transit developing countries that provide transit services to the LLDCs that also have the major seaports that are used by the LLDCs. The LLDCs and transit countries need each other as the LLDCs also provide transit corridors important for connecting the transit countries to other countries in the region and they also offer markets to transit countries.

The Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for the LLDCs for the decade 2014 to 2024 underscores the importance of partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries in the implementation of its six priority areas. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development is intended to deliver sustainable development and has transformative Sustainable Development Goals and targets that can help all countries including LLDCs and transit countries to achieve inclusive sustainable development and to leave no one behind. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the Vienna Programme of Action which includes transit policy, trade and infrastructure issues is integral to the Agenda. Thus effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action is crucial for the attainment of the SDGs and in leaving no one behind in the LLDCs. Effective partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries are important and necessary to drive the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the VPoA forward.

The Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developing Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) organized a High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was held from 7 to 9 March in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. The event brought together 200 participants including ministers, senior representatives and participants from member states UN, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, private sector, think tanks and other stakeholders.

The meeting discussed areas of how to improve cooperation between the LLDCs and the transit countries to increase their trade potential and achievement of the SDGs. The meeting offered a platform for participants to share ideas, lessons learnt, good practices, future policies, programmes and initiatives on how to improve transit cooperation, connectivity, trade and trade facilitation and strengthen the linkages between the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The meeting also explored how to revitalize global partnerships and support from the development partners and international financial institutions and organizations towards improved cooperation between LLDCs and the transit countries in implementing the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda.

KEY

RECOMENDATIONS

In view of the discussions, the meeting made the following recommendations to enhance cooperation between the LLDCs and transit countries.

I. ENHANCING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. LLDCs and transit countries should work together to enhance cooperation in areas that have a great impact on stimulating economic diversification and value addition to achieve sustainable economic development including: enhancing regional and trans-border physical infrastructure connectivity (roads, transport, power, ICTs); and soft infrastructure (policies and institutions to promote transit and trade facilitation), sharing of markets, investment, ideas, knowledge, expertise, and technologies including through South-South and Triangular Co-operation.
2. LLDCs and transit countries should integrate the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda into national plans, strategies and budgets at the national level.
3. LLDCs and transit countries should strengthen cooperation to address environmental and climatic issues such as glacier melting, pollution, drought and floods and desertification.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should intensify sharing of experiences, lessons learned and best practices on successful sustainable development policies, initiatives and solutions to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. It is also important for the LLDCs and transit countries to replicate and scale up best practice initiatives. South-South and Triangular Co-operation to support initiatives by the LLDCs and transit countries should be promoted, for example support towards exchange of visits or establishment of a mechanism for experience sharing.
5. Greater international support should be mobilized to support regional and bilateral cooperation initiatives that boost inclusive and sustainable economic development, trade, and tourism, and improve infrastructure (transport, energy and ICT).
6. LLDCs and transit countries should share experiences on statistics and data collection to support rigorous and evidence-based follow-up, monitoring and review. Development partners, international and regional institutions and national stakeholders are encouraged to support these efforts and to strengthen national statistical capacity for monitoring progress.

II. COOPERATION ON TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSIT CORRIDORS - BEST PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. LLDCs and transit countries should collaborate to establish secure, reliable, efficient, quality and sustainable infrastructure and transit transport systems, and upgrade existing infrastructure to international standards, with the support of development partners, including multilateral financial and development institutions

and regional banks.

2. LLDCs and transit countries should develop and engage in sub-regional and regional transport agreements on the development of infrastructure and facilitation of goods in transit.
3. Countries should build upon and expand existing initiatives to develop high quality, effective and reliable transport routes between Europe and Asia, with a view to strengthening connectivity between the two regions.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should enhance cooperation to ensure harmonized and simplified customs procedures and regulatory policies, smoother border crossing procedures, enhanced use of information technologies and electronic systems and improved border agency cooperation to improve transit traffic along transport routes.
5. Multilateral and regional development banks should support LLDCs and transit countries in developing bankable implementable infrastructure and transport projects that are financially viable, environmentally friendly and accepted by the local communities.
6. There is a need to allocate considerable financial resources for the improvement of transport systems, including from public and private sources. Cooperation with international financial institutions and enhancing participation of private sector in financing, including through public private partnerships for transport infrastructure development, should be promoted.

III. ENHANCING COOPERATION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND TRADE FACILITATION

1. LLDCs and transit countries who are Members of the WTO should expedite the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. LLDCs and transit country Members who have not ratified the Agreement should ratify the Agreement in order to reduce trade costs. LLDCs should notify their category C commitments, including their capacity needs to take advantage of the technical assistance opportunities.
2. Cooperation for trade facilitation should be enhanced at all levels – national, bi-lateral and regional.
3. The development assistance provided in the context of the Aid for Trade initiative should give greater consideration to the special needs and requirements of LLDCs and support initiatives of LLDCs and transit countries that are aimed at improving trade facilitation.
4. The 11th WTO Ministerial Conference should deliver development oriented outcome which can contribute to the sustainable development of the vulnerable members of the WTO including the LLDCs.
5. LLDCs should create conducive environment for industrial development including through building infrastructure, building productivity capacities, and enhancing the services sector. Greater focus should also be given to investment facilitation and should address capacity challenges of the micro small and medium enterprises.
6. The participation of LLDCs in the WTO should be strengthened, and particular attention should be given to the future work programme of LLDCs that would have trade facilitation as one of its main focus.

IV. ENHANCING COOPERATION ON LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSIT AT BILATERAL, REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL LEVELS

1. LLDCs and transit countries should cooperate and coordinate on fundamental transit policies, laws and regulations and towards enhancing freedom of transit.
2. LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to join relevant international conventions, in particular the TIR Convention, Harmonization Convention, and the Revised Kyoto Convention given their potential benefits, as well as bilateral, sub-regional and regional agreements and ensure their effective implementation, with a view to promote the harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules, formalities and documentation for all modes of transport.
3. Bilateral and regional agreements on transit should consider provisions for effective information exchange, including information protection issues, limitations on the use of information and provide for harmonization of information requirements in line with international standards.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should be guided by and in conformity with international standards when developing bilateral and regional transit agreements.
5. LLDCs and transit countries should make use of the technical assistance and capacity-building support provided by relevant international organizations towards the effective accession, ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions.

V. STRATEGIES AND EXPERIENCE SHARING ON PROMOTING CUSTOMS COOPERATION

1. Customs Administrations should modernize their Customs transit regimes, based on the WCO Transit Guidelines to be published in July 2017, in order to facilitate transit movement with a view of supporting economic development of LLDCs.
2. Customs Administrations should enhance cooperation with other border regulatory agencies to effectively implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).
3. Customs Administrations should establish bilateral, sub-regional or regional cooperative mechanisms with their neighbouring Customs Administrations to ensure smooth movement of transit goods, including data exchange of transit goods, guarantees and Customs seals.

VI. ENHANCING PARTNERSHIPS AND THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Bilateral and multilateral development partners are encouraged to increase their technical and financial assistance to support joint infrastructure development initiatives by LLDCs and transit countries.
2. Development Partners are encouraged to scale up provision of technical, financial and capacity building assistance to LLDCs and transit countries for the effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, infrastructure development, and other areas of cooperation for the effective achievement of the SDGs including through enhanced ODA, and aid for trade.
3. While ODA will remain critical, ODA alone cannot finance the programs and projects needed to achieve the SDGs. More private sector resources need to be brought on board to help finance the needed programs and projects including Public Private Partnerships.
4. Strengthen technical and scientific cooperation including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation on human resource development, including training, exchange of experiences and expertise, knowledge transfer and technical assistance for capacity-building.

VII. WAY FORWARD

1. The meeting proposed that the key recommendations be submitted to the 2017 Meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers responsible for trade to be held in Ha Noi on 20-21 May 2017, to consider reflecting the recommendations in the Ministerial Statement as appropriate.
2. The meeting also called on all partner institutions to take into account the issue of LLDCs and transit countries and consider establishing dedicated support towards their joint initiatives.
3. The Meeting called on Special Meeting of ECOSOC on “Innovations for Infrastructure Development and promoting Sustainable Industrialization”, to be held on 31 May in New York to take into account the relevant recommendations on sustainable infrastructure development from this meeting.
4. The recommendations should be presented to the High-Level Political Forum, which among others is considering SDG 9 on infrastructure and industrialization which are particularly relevant to LLDCs.
5. The Meeting called on the UN PGA to take into account the recommendations of this meeting in his upcoming events including: on climate change, sustainable financing, technology and innovation; and education for all.
6. LLDCs have to remain engaged in the discussions in preparation for WTO’s 11th Ministerial Conference which will take place in Buenos Aires in December 2017 on some of the issues being discussed that would be of benefit to them.
7. The LLDCs and transit countries should continue to be engaged in the follow up processes to the Global Sustainable Transport Conference.
8. The LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to attend and participate in the WCO Global Transit Conference to be held 10-11 July 2017 in Brussels, Belgium.

9. The Global Infrastructure Forum should give due attention to LLDCs and transit issues.
10. The LLDCs should be actively involved in advancing the Sustainable Mobility for All initiative given its potential benefits including among other issues; access, safety and efficient systems which can only improve transport logistics and facilitate transit trade.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Meeting expressed profound appreciation to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for generously hosting the meeting. The Meeting expressed gratitude to the substantive support and financial contribution of the Office of the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS) and financial contribution by the World Customs Organization and International Road Transport Union. Paraguay was appreciated for its role as Coordinator for trade and development issues of the Group of LLDCs in Geneva. The Meeting also appreciated the active participation and substantive contributions of other partners such as UN system organizations, multi-lateral and regional development banks, other international and regional organizations, development partners, the private sector, the think tanks and other stakeholders.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

| | | | |
|----------------|---|-----------------|---|
| ACTS | ASEAN Customs Transit System | CVTFS | COMESA Virtual Trade Facilitation System |
| ADB | Asian Development Bank | DCFTA | Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area |
| ADR | European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road | DG TAXUD | Taxation and Customs Union Directorate General |
| AEC | ASEAN Economic Community | DTIS | Diagnostic Trade Integration Strategy |
| AETR | European Agreement concerning the Work of Crews of Vehicles Engaged in International Road Transport | EAEC | Eurasian Economic Community |
| AFAFGIT | ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Goods in Transit | EAEU | Eurasian Economic Union |
| AFAFIST | ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Inter-State Transport | EC | European Commission |
| AFAMT | ASEAN Framework Agreement on Multimodal Transport | ECOSOC | United Nations Economic and Social Council |
| AHN | Asian Highway Network | ED | External Domain |
| AIIB | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank | EFTA | European Free Trade Association |
| AITD | Asian Institute of Transport Development | EIA | European Investment Bank |
| ANPDF | National Peace and Development Framework of Afghanistan | TIR-EPD | TIR Electronic Pre-Declaration |
| APEC | Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation | EU | European Union |
| APIM | Asia Pacific Institute of Mongolia | FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations | FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| ASYCUDA | Automated System for Customs Data | GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| ATA | ATA Carnet (Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission) | GATTV | GATT Article 5 Freedom of Transit |
| BASPA | Black and Azov Seas Ports Association | GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| BBIN | Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative | GE | Group of Experts |
| BCP | Border Crossing Points | GIZ | Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| BIMSTEC | Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation | GMS | Guarantee Management System |
| BOT | Build-Operate-Transfer | GNP | Gross National Product |
| BRICS | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa | GPS | Global Positioning System |
| BSECO | Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization | GSO | General Statistics Office of Vietnam |
| CAREC | Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation | GTR | Greater Tumen Initiative |
| CAS | Customs Administration of Serbia | GUAM | Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova |
| CCTT | Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transportation | GVC | Global Value Chains |
| CD | Common Domain | HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| CEFTA | Central European Free Trade Agreement | HLPF | High-level Political Forum |
| CEI | Central European Initiative | HQ | Headquarter |
| CFS | Container Freight Station | ICC | International Chamber of Commerce |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States | ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa | IDA | International Development Association |
| CTC | Common Transit Convention | IGC | International Grains Council |
| CTS | Common Transit System | IMR | Infant Mortality Ratio |
| | | IPA | Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance |
| | | IPPC | International Plant Protection Convention |
| | | IRF | International Road Federation |
| | | IRTU | International Radio and Television Union |
| | | IRU | International Road Transport Union |
| | | IT | Information Technology |
| | | ITU | International Telecommunication Union |
| | | JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| | | LLDC | Landlocked Developing Countries |

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|----------------|--|
| LTP | Lao Trade Portal | SPS | Sanitary and Phytosanitary |
| MDB | Multilateral Development Bank | STI | Science, Technology, and Innovation |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | TAPI | Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India |
| MHI | Model Highway Initiative | TCG | Trade Contract Group |
| MLA | Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Europe-the Caucasus-Asia Corridor | TFA | Trade Facilitation Agreement |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding | TFSP | Trade Facilitation Support Program |
| MPI | Ministry of Planning and Investment | TIR | Transports Internationaux Routiers |
| MS | Member States | TMS | Transimex Corporation |
| MW | Megawatts | TRACECA | Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia |
| NAP | National Action Plan | TTF | Transport and Trade Facilitation |
| NCTS | New Computerized Transit System | TUTAP | Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan |
| ND | National Domain | UN | United Nations |
| NELTI | New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative | UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| NPP | National Project Plan | UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| NT | National Transit | UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| NTA | National Transit Application | UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| NTATA | ATA Carnet through NCTS System | UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| NTCIM | Transit of Goods by Rail through NCTS System | UNESCAP | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| NTTIR | TIR Carnet through NCTS System | UNGA | United Nations General Assembly |
| OBOR | One Belt, One Road | URTA | Union of Road Transport Associations |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance | USG | Under-Secretary-General |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development | VCCI | Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| UN-OHRLS | United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States | VCIS | Vietnam Customs Information System |
| OLAF | European Anti-Fraud Office | VNACCS | Vietnam Automated Cargo and Port Consolidated System |
| OSBP | One-Stop Border Posts | VPoA | Vienna Programme of Action for the decade 2014 to 2024 |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe | VSDG | Vietnam's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 |
| OTS | Old Transit System (Paper Based Transit) | WBG | World Bank Group |
| PERMIS | Permanent International Secretariat | WCO | World Customs Organization |
| PGA | President of the General Assembly | WG | Internal Working Group |
| PPP | Public-Private Partnership | AFT-WP | Aid-for-Trade Work Programme for 2016-2017 |
| RCI | Regional Cooperation and Integration | WTO | World Trade Organization |
| RCTG | Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Bond | | |
| RKC | Revised Kyoto Convention | | |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation | | |
| SAD | Single Administrative Document | | |
| SASEC | South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation | | |
| SCC | State Customs Committee | | |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organisation | | |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals | | |
| SIDS | Small Island Developing States | | |
| SME | Small and Medium-sized Enterprises | | |

HIGH-LEVEL EURO-ASIA REGIONAL MEETING ON IMPROVING 2030 COOPERATION ON TRANSIT, TRADE FACILITATION AND THE AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A. Opening session

The meeting opened with a high-level panel that included: H.E. Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the S.R. of Viet Nam; Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative, UN-OHRLS; H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of UN Economic and Social Council; H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau, Special Envoy of the President of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly on SDG implementation and Climate Change; Mr. Hongbu Wu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Ms. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships, World Bank; Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary-General of World Customs Organisation; Mr. Jin Liqun, President of Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank; Mr. Bambang Susantono, Asian Development Bank Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development; and Mr. Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General of International Road Transport Union.

In his statement **H.E. Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the S.R. of Viet Nam**, welcomed all participants to Viet Nam and to the meeting. He indicated that 2017 would be the second year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - an ambitious, transformative and holistic development agenda of the people, for the people, and by the people. The 2030 Agenda had been supported by a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development and guided by the principles of equity, of common but differentiated responsibilities, and of leaving no one and no country behind.

The Deputy Prime Minister then stressed Viet Nam's

commitment to the 2030 Agenda. He indicated that Viet Nam believed that enhanced international co-operation and multi-stakeholder engagement would be crucial to help all countries, including transit countries and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), overcome our own challenges, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Viet Nam also firmly believed that partnership and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and benefits between LLDCs and transit countries would remain the path to a future of shared prosperity.

He stated that through Viet Nam's experience of over 30 years of reform and international integration, Viet Nam had come to fully appreciate that trade and investment facilitation had been critical to economic growth and poverty alleviation. Viet Nam's membership in the WTO, ASEAN, APEC and its participation in various Free Trade Agreements, including the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, had given Viet Nam's goods better and easier access to global markets. This contributed immensely to the achievement of Viet Nam's socio-economic goals and most of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Deputy Prime Minister pointed out that although with a 3,000-kilometer-long coastline, Viet Nam also had mountainous and remote areas facing difficulties in infrastructure and economic linkages. Viet Nam could thus appreciate the challenges LLDCs were facing due to their geographical disadvantages. He underscored that Viet Nam had always made it one of its highest priorities to foster relations with neighbouring countries, including strong economic linkages. Viet Nam believed the success and prosperity of its neighbours would have a positive multiplier effect on their own development and help advance the sustainable development of the whole region.

He further indicated that Viet Nam had taken concrete steps to strengthen economic linkages and infrastructure connectivity with its neighbours, especially with its only LLDC brother, the Lao PDR, both bilaterally and regionally. Viet Nam had been work-

ing closely with other countries in the Lower Mekong Basin to develop economic corridors in order to link remote regions with international seaports. The East – West Economic Corridor aimed to connect inland provinces of Myanmar, Northern Thailand, Lao PDR, and the Central region of Viet Nam, with both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as part of the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan. Another flagship project of ASEAN, he pointed out, was the ASEAN Single Window live operation, which aimed to expedite cargo clearance and facilitate cross-border movement of goods.

The Deputy Prime Minister highlighted details of Viet Nam's bilateral cooperation with Lao PDR -- Lao PDR and Viet Nam had put in place the Single-Stop Inspection model at Lao Bao – Dansavanh border checkpoint on the East-West Economic Corridor and would apply this model at all border check points between the two countries. The two countries had also been cooperating to enable Laos's access to Vung Ang Sea Port on the coast of Viet Nam as a gateway to ASEAN and the international market. Lao PDR and Viet Nam had agreed to build the Vientiane-Hanoi highway to further facilitate the regional trade flow. In this regard, Viet Nam greatly appreciated Japan and ADB for their support and called on other development partners to join the efforts in transit infrastructure development. He also expressed gratitude to the United Nations for its support and assured the meeting participants that Viet Nam would continue contributing to the sustainable and reliable development in LLDCs. The year 2017, as he pointed out, marked 40 years of Viet Nam's membership in the United Nations.

The Deputy Prime Minister stressed that Viet Nam had done its best to contribute to the work of the UN over the last four decades and planned to do more. He said that Viet Nam was pleased to organize this Meeting to deliberate on issues relevant not only to Viet Nam, to the LLDCs and transit countries in the Euro-Asia region, but also to the entire UN membership that had been taking action on the global development agenda. Bold and transformative steps needed to be taken to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. He appealed to all members to work together to help turn land-locked countries into land-linked countries, to move forward together and truly leave no one behind.

In his statement, Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States, stressed that the 2030 Agenda is a transformative global framework with ambitions to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, promote sustainable development, and protect our environment, while leaving no one behind. However, to translate the goals into reality, he indicated that it would be critical that we could pursue an integrated approach, collaborate with all the stakeholders, and mobilize comprehensive means of implementation including ODA, domestic resource mobilization, trade, investment, technology, and capacity building.

The High Representative stated that trade is a key element of the means of implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as it could be seen as an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. He pointed out that, despite the pivotal role of international trade in achieving sustainable development, shares of exports from LLDCs remained low (approximately 1% of global exports), signalling the marginalization of LLDC economies. He noted that this was probably due to distance to seaports, underdeveloped transportation systems, as well as onerous transit and border procedures. Uncompetitive situations also made LLDCs far less attractive to investments. The LLDCs had to pay more than double what coastal countries incurred as well as required double the time taken by transit countries to send and receive merchandise from overseas markets which rendered them uncompetitive thus discouraging investment including FDI. Besides, LLDCs also manifested a high export concentration ratio when compared with that of other groups of countries, as their exports were highly concentrated on a limited number of products particularly commodities.

Mr. Acharya emphasized that the Vienna Programme of Action is a holistic development framework that reflected a commitment of the international community to help LLDCs tackle landlockedness through the priority areas that include: Fundamental transit Policy Issues; Infrastructure Development and Maintenance; International Trade and Trade Facilitation; Regional Integration and Cooperation, Structural Economic Transformation, and Means of Implementation. All of

the areas, said Mr. Acharya, would need worldwide collaboration and significant efforts made by LLDCs and their development partners. The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognized the special needs and challenges faced by LLDCs and stressed the need for the international community to support the development efforts of the LLDCs.

Mr. Acharya highlighted several key areas of cooperation, including hard infrastructure improvements, soft infrastructure refinements (trading policy and regulatory framework reforms), the global ratification of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, domestic resource mobilization and financing for development, as well as economic structural transformation of LLDCs and transit countries. Details are as follows:

1. Deepened regional integration and cooperation would be needed to improve the hard physical infrastructure important to allow faster movement of goods belonging to the LLDCs to transit through their neighbours to the seaports. He acknowledged the efforts undertaken in the region in improving connectivity -- in particular, initiatives such as the Asia Highway Network, Trans-Asia Railway Network, the Central Asian Regional Cooperation (CAREC) Programme, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), and the One Belt, One Road Initiative. However, he also pointed out that more efforts would be needed to close the infrastructure gaps, the missing links, to expand and upgrade all modes of transport infrastructure needed to connect the LLDCs to sea ports, and to build resilient transport infrastructure.

2. Faster movement of goods in transit would require improving the soft infrastructure -- enhancing the legal framework comprised of international transit treaties such as the TIR Convention, and regional, sub-regional, and bilateral agreements that governed transit issues at the border, between the borders and behind the borders. It would also require the improvement in the regulatory framework including harmonization of customs procedures and standards, regulatory consistency in how rules at the border are applied, and harmonization of policies between the LLDCs and transit countries, increased use of ICT applications for trade and transport facilitation, as well as transparency and consistency in fees and charges.

3. He underscored that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, which entered into force on the 22nd of February 2017 could reduce trading costs and delays including passage of goods and streamlining of border procedures. He then asked for rapid implementation of the agreement. He also affirmed the importance of providing assistance to members who had capacity challenges.

4. Investment needs had been high in both the LLDCs and transit countries. Domestic resource mobilization for infrastructure financing remains critical. Mr. Acharya pointed out that domestic public finance alone could hardly meet the total financing needs. The importance for greater partnerships therefore could never be overemphasized. Governments, the private sector, regional, international organizations, civil society, North-South and South-South cooperation could all be important. Public resources, including ODA, would need to be used in a catalytic way to attract and leverage sufficient investment. The role of multilateral and regional development banks, in providing financing, would be crucial. The efforts that the financial institutions were undertaking were acknowledged and greatly appreciated. However more efforts would be needed, including in the form of dedicated infrastructure funding for the LLDCs. This had been an area in which the LLDCs continue to dialogue with the financial institutions.

5. He also emphasized the deepened cooperation in areas that could help both the LLDCs and transit countries to achieve the SDGs. Examples are: experience sharing and cooperation on enhancing efficiency and competitiveness, enhancing of productive capacities, increasing value addition, market expansion, and upgrading of the value chains. These, as he mentioned, could lead towards structural transformation of both the LLDCs and transit countries and greatly contribute to poverty eradication and promote sustainable development.

Mr. Acharya finally concluded that global cooperation would be beneficial to all and would help accelerate the progress towards achievement of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. He pointed out that collective work could transform landlocked countries into land-linked countries and that the important result could be the central pledge of the SDGs to bring about transformative

change while leaving no one behind. Enhanced level of Cooperation between the LLDCs and the transit countries would create a win-win situation, since it was through multifaceted cooperation and smooth regional connectivity that they could be able to improve their transport infrastructure, enhance trade, economic growth and overall sustainable development.

In his statement, H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of UN Economic and Social Council, pointed out that, in 2015, global leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which would have an enormous impact on the LLDCs and transit countries. He noted that the 2030 Agenda recognized that the Vienna Programme of Action and its six priority areas which included transit policy issues were integral to the Agenda. Thus effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action would be crucial for the attainment of the SDGs and in leaving no one behind in the LLDCs.

Mr. Shava stated that effective partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries would be important and necessary to drive the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the VPoA forward. Partnerships would be critical in particular on proven mechanisms for enhancing transport infrastructure development and connectivity, improving ICT connectivity, improving and harmonizing border crossing procedures, scaling up trade facilitation initiatives, and implementing conducive legal framework for transit transport. He further mentioned that the deepening of cooperation between neighbours and overall regional integration required continued commitment of the national leadership, dedicated support from national and international partners, and sufficient resources.

He underscored that ECOSOC, as the principal United Nations body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as for implementation of the internationally agreed development goals had been very important in advancing the LLDCs development agenda. The annual cycle of the ECOSOC presented various opportunities to pay attention to their priorities. The specific needs of LLDCs could be integrated into the discussions of the various functional commissions, various segments and expert bodies, and high-level meetings. Such opportunities

included the Partnership Forum, Integration Segment, the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs and the Financing for Development Forum, amongst others.

Mr. Shava alluded to the fact that the Council had been dedicating time in 2017 to address infrastructure development and industrialization, as a high priority for all the countries in special situations. He said he would be convening a Special Meeting of the ECOSOC on “Innovations for Infrastructure Development and promoting Sustainable Industrialization”, to be held in May in New York. He hoped that this meeting would come up with tangible and concrete proposals in particular on sustainable infrastructure development that could also feed into the global meeting.

He further stated that the High-Level Political Forum would review Goal 9 among other seven goals this year. In terms of infrastructure development, it had been noted that transport was the only aspect that had no dedicated goal. In this regard, he welcomed the World Bank coordinated initiative on Sustainable Mobility for All, which addressed among other issues; access, safety and efficient systems which could only improve transport logistics and facilitate transit trade.

He put forward that the High-Level Political Forum to be convened under the auspices of the ECOSOC high-level segment in July could also present an opportunity to raise the LLDC issues. It was evident that the LLDCs were engaging more and more in this process and that they needed to be commended. In 2016, there was only one LLDC participating in the Voluntary National Reviews out of the 22 participants. In 2017 seven LLDCs would participate. It would be an important opportunity to learn from their experiences, in particular on how to address LLDC-specific challenges.

Mr. Shava reiterated that the ECOSOC was committed to continuing to address the special challenges of the LLDCs as well as to support their neighbouring transit countries that were also developing countries to achieve sustainable development. The Council would work to ensure that due attention was paid to their challenges and to raise the support of the international community for the LLDC cause.

H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau, Special Envoy on SDG implementation and Climate Change, delivered a Message of H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. He felt honoured to deliver the following statement on behalf of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Peter Thomson, who unfortunately could not attend the meeting due to other multilateral commitments.

Mr. Thompson's message highlighted that when world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they agreed to a universal masterplan which, if implemented urgently, effectively, and at scale, would transform the world by eradicating extreme poverty, building peaceful and inclusive societies, advancing gender equality, combating climate change, and protecting natural environment. In order for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be realized for the more than 489 million people living Landlocked Developing Countries, focused attention needed to be given to the unique economic challenges these nations were facing due to their geographic circumstances. Besides, targeted initiatives needed to be developed to help overcome the economic disadvantages they were facing due to their lack of direct access to sea routes, increased logistical costs for trade, more restricted investment opportunities, reliance on commodities, and relative isolation from world markets.

The message emphasized that meetings such as this would therefore be vital, in bringing together representatives from Euro-Asia LLDCs, transit developing countries, the United Nations, and other key partners, to discuss mutually beneficial ways to strengthen transit cooperation, and improve regional and international trade opportunities for LLDCs. He said that a number of further key steps should be pursued.

This includes, firstly, ensuring the full implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Nairobi Package of the 10th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, the outcome of last year's UN Conference on Sustainable Transportation, and other relevant international agreements.

Secondly, the international community must all give favourable consideration to options aimed at strengthening regional and bilateral cooperation, in order to boost sustainable economic development, trade, and tourism, and improve transport infrastructure.

Thirdly, the international community must examine ways to simplify, harmonize and standardize transport and transit procedures to enable smoother access to regional transit and transport infrastructure.

Fourthly, encouragement should be given to the pursuit of policy reforms at national levels to drive long-term economic growth, including by investing in educational and training opportunities for local populations, particularly women and girls. And there is need to strengthen collaboration and coordination amongst all key stakeholders, including across Government, the UN, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant partners.

Mr. Thompson's message stressed that, as part of his effort to drive a universal push to implement the Sustainable Development Goals around our world, he would be convening a series of High-Level SDG Action Events, over the coming months, which would address critical cross-cutting issues of concerns for LLDCs. These SDG Action Events, all to be held at UN Headquarters in New York, would address climate change on 23 March; sustainable financing on 18 April; technology and innovation on 17 May; and education for all on 28 June. He encouraged all of the meeting participants to participate at the highest possible levels at these events – as well as in the UN's Ocean Conference to be held from 5-9 June.

In his statement, **Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs**, noted that the 2030 Agenda underscored the importance of universal access to sustainable transport systems, calling upon member states to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all by 2030. He indicated that sustainable transport was included in the targets related to the Sustainable Development Goals on Health (SDG 3) and on Sustainable Cities (SDG 11). In addition, transport was connected to many other SDGs, including Women's Empowerment (SDG 5), Economic Growth (SDG 8), Resilient Infrastructure (SDG 9), Climate

Change (SDG 13) and others.

He recalled that in November, 2017, the United Nations convened the first-ever Global Sustainable Transport Conference in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The concrete outcomes of the Conference included a forward-looking statement on commitments and policy recommendations on sustainable transport, and a list of partnerships, voluntary commitments and initiatives to support sustainable transport. The message from the Conference, he said, was clear - sustainable transport had been a key driver of sustainable economic growth and economic integration, while protecting our ecosystems.

Mr. Wu acknowledged that our current transport systems are characterized by unsustainable practices -- the transport sector account for nearly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions. Every year, one and a quarter million people died because of traffic accidents and most of these fatalities occurred in developing countries. He pointed out that urgent actions should be taken at all levels, national, regional and global, to ensure that the services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods could be provided in an affordable, accessible, efficient, and resilient manner, while minimizing the green-house gas emissions and the negative impacts to environment. He urged participants and countries to launch the transport sector transformation.

He urged the international community to start its transition to green transport, to strengthen connectivity in all modes -- road, rail, aviation, ferry and maritime, to achieve basic equity on provision of transport and to leave no one behind. Besides, He stressed that special attention should be given to the needs of developing countries, in particular SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs.

For LLDCs, he underscored that it would be important to establish and promote efficient transit transport systems that could link them to international markets, including by taking the following measures in synergy, not in silo: By developing, upgrading and maintaining all modes of transit transport infrastructure; By promoting and harmonising enabling environment, regulatory frameworks and institutional arrangements for transit; and By forging genuine partnerships between landlocked and transit de-

veloping countries and their development partners at the national, bilateral, sub-regional, regional and global levels.

In his statement, **Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development**, highlighted UNCTAD's strong support to transit and trade facilitation of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) through capacity-building and policy research. He recognised the importance of increased international trade to structural economic transformation and the sustainable development of the LLDCs.

In her statement, **Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of The Economic and Social Commission for Asia**, made three points.

Firstly, she said that appreciating the context and diagnostics of Asian LLDCs would require understanding the critical barriers that they are facing in trade, transit and transport connectivity. Accounting for a meagre 0.7 per cent of global exports, the 12 Asian LLDCs lacked export diversification and had limited participation in Global Value Chains (GVCs). Asian LLDCs had been facing trade costs 50 percent higher than the Asia-Pacific average. Complex and cumbersome trade and transit procedures accounted for a significant share of trade costs. For instance, in Central Asian LLDCs, each transaction typically involved over 20 procedures and 20 or more public and private agencies. Reducing these costs and delays could be the difference between a business failing or thriving; and would be essential if the full value of enhanced transport infrastructure were to be realized.

Secondly, she stated that tackling these issues had become an urgent priority as global trade grew by less than 3 per cent for the sixth consecutive year since 2010. Continued cyclical downturn in demand, rising trade protectionism, a deceleration in the expansion of GVC-related trade and the structural rebalancing of China would further complicate the future trade scenario for Asian LLDCs.

Thirdly, she pointed out that swift action to land-link and diversify LLDCs' exporting capacities would be critical. Development of mega-regional endeavours

in this context was very much welcome, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity. Likewise, multimodal transport networks and investment in trade facilitation soft infrastructure would reinforce each other and thereby help spur trade and open up access to regional and global import and export markets.

To address LLDCs' deep-rooted structural challenges, the ESCAP has adopted a multi-sectoral approach, reinforced by effective partnerships and regional economic cooperation and integration. By way of example, ESCAP's transport sector technical assistance had helped plan and coordinate the development of land links and technical standards in LLDCs and transit countries. Complementing this, ESCAP had developed a set of tools for joint utilization by LLDCs and transit countries to reduce non-physical barriers and delays at border crossings. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific was negotiated on the ESCAP platform and would support the efficient implementation of trade rules and the development of cross-border ecommerce in Asia-Pacific.

The ESCAP had also built a number of effective partnerships to support trade facilitation in LLDCs, including, among others, with: ADB in Bhutan and Nepal to build capacity to self-assess and prioritize trade facilitation reform; With the WTO to develop a trade costs database for the Aid for Trade global reviews; and, With the IPPC, the WTO, and the FAO to streamline issuance and exchange of sanitary and phytosanitary certificates.

Finally, she highlighted that the ESCAP supported the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement through the ESCAP-led UN Regional Commissions Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation. She emphasized that harmonizing the over 400 bilateral agreements and 40 plus sub-regional agreements in Asia related to cross-border and transit transport would be critical to consolidate fragmented frameworks. At the same time, global trade facilitation efforts must be harnessed effectively through operationalization of paperless cross-border trade. Collaboration and cooperation to ensure multilateral and bilateral efforts conform to harmonized standards and guidelines would deliver cost savings and greater time efficiency.

In his statement, **Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships, at World Bank**, underscored the World Bank Group's commitment to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and appreciation of the unique challenges landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face, including high transport costs and burdensome border procedures, remoteness and isolation from international markets. These challenges, according to Mr. Mohieldin, would hinder the ability to harness international trade and structurally transform an economy.

He also pointed out the untapped potential that LLDCs would have by being land-linked and providing transport routes between coastal neighbours and building new economic corridors that could facilitate enterprise and investment across regions. He mentioned that investments had been made in facilitating transit cooperation and transit trade and connecting the LLDCs with major Asian and European markets in the Euro-Asia region.

He acknowledged that the resources needed to achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda were far in excess of the current flow of official development assistance, estimated roughly at \$135 billion per year. He suggested that Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds must be used more strategically and catalytically to be fit for purpose and effectively to support the 2030 Agenda.

He confirmed that the World Bank Group remained committed to supporting landlocked and transit countries through their fund for the poorest, the International Development Association (IDA). He said that over 60 donor and recipient countries agreed to step up the fight against extreme poverty, in this past December, with a record commitment of \$75 billion to IDA. This was, according to Mr. Mohieldin, a milestone in the fight against extreme poverty and a testament in the faith of multilateral institutions such as the WBG to deliver development results.

Mr. Mohieldin recalled that, for the first time, IDA started seeking to leverage its equity by blending donor contributions with internal resources and funds raised through debt markets, enabling it to provide clients with billions of dollars in additional resources.

IDA's recent triple-A credit ratings was an important first step to enable capital market access. Donor contributions remained central to this model, to ensure its financial sustainability and to enable IDA to provide concessional terms in line with its development objectives. This innovative IDA18 financing package offered exceptional value for money, with every \$1 in partner contributions enabling about \$3 in spending authority.

What this meant for LLDCs, he said, was that in total, IDA-eligible LLDCs (23 out of the 32 countries classified as LLDCs according to the UN-ORHLLS) would receive an indicative allocation of about US\$17.4 billion in Concessional Core financing during IDA18. This represented over a USD 5 billion increase from IDA17 commitments. In addition to the concessional core financing, additional resources would be available to all IDA countries under the non-core regimes (e.g. Crisis Response Window, Regional Program, and Private Sector Window).

He also recalled that as in the past, these funds would support wide ranging development activities in transport and ICT infrastructure, trade facilitation, connectivity, and corridor-based projects in landlocked and transit countries. He also reminded that World Bank's work did not only cover financing. On the Knowledge front, the World Bank had been engaged in modernizing transit regimes, improving competition in the national and regional transport markets, assisting in the development of bilateral arrangements granting transport and transit rights, and promoting a functioning and competitive ICT sector to allow for affordable, accessible, and high-quality telecommunications services across borders.

Mr. Mohieldin then emphasized the importance of mobilizing additional private sector resources. He stated that they were positioning the World Bank Group not only as a provider, but also as a facilitator of capital, in support of financing for development agenda. A large pool of private capital was yet to be catalysed for development purposes, and the World Bank was developing new tools and approaches to crowd in this money and help boost economic growth and employment. This was, according to him, particularly relevant to LLDCs, where private capital remains scarce in the majority of cases.

Lastly, he mentioned that the World Bank had been promoting trade facilitation to better sequence its interventions. The World Bank had developed a "cascade approach" to investment decision-making. The model would make sure that the "Private Sector goes first, Public dollars last". In other words, if a development program could be financed on commercial terms without government guarantees, while remaining affordable and offering value for money, then that investment could not be a priority for concessional or public financing. The newly established IDA private sector window would support this approach by making available USD 2.5 billion.

In his statement, **Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary-General of World Customs Organisation**, indicated that the World Customs Organization (WCO), with its wide network of 180 Customs administrations, is the centre of Customs expertise and practical information for trade facilitation and border management. The WCO is recognized as the voice of the international Customs community. He pointed out that landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) must rely on transit through other countries, because of their lack of access to the sea. The additional border crossings and long distances from the market substantially increased their total transport expenses.

He noted that a transit operation inevitably involved Customs administrations, and good Customs transit procedures would be essential to the smooth operation of international trade, thereby contributing to the economic development of LLDCs. He mentioned that the WCO launched a Transit Handbook in 2014 during the Vienna Conference for LLDCs. To support WCO Members better in establishing more effective transit regimes, they decided that the Transit Handbook should become "Transit Guidelines" containing clear guiding principles and recommended practice for transit regimes. He pointed out that the WCO will organize Global Conference on Transit on 10-11 July to launch the guidelines.

He stressed that the effective implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement had been one of the most important topics to ensure economic development of LLDCs. In this regard, the WCO welcomed entry into force of the TFA. The WCO had been, and would continue to be, fully committed to making the TFA a success in practical terms. He noted that the

WCO had already produced a wide range of instruments and tools which supported the implementation of the TFA and had delivered an extensive number of capacity building and technical assistance projects on trade facilitation.

In June 2014, as he recalled, the WCO launched the WCO Mercator Programme. Under the Mercator Programme, the WCO had delivered around 210 technical assistance missions to more than 70 countries in the past 2 years and would continue to do so. He also committed himself to supporting LLDCs by developing standards on border procedures and providing technical assistance.

In his statement, **Mr. Jin Liqun, President of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**, introduced that the AIIB was created to foster sustainable economic growth and development, as well as promote regional connectivity and cooperation, through investment in infrastructure and other productive sectors. One year into operation, the AIIB had made important progress in varying respects, and had approved a lending program of \$1.73 billion. He said that it was unprecedentedly important for the AIIB to strengthen its narrative and sharpen its focus on what it meant to be a multilateral development bank in the 21st century.

From where he stand, he believed that internationalism and the AIIB would have an important role to play in teaming up with sovereign governments, international organizations, and the private sector, to address the infrastructure challenges of Land Locked Developing Countries.

As a multilateral development bank, according to Mr. Jin, part of the AIIB's job was to help developing countries pick projects that could improve social and economic outcomes without following the beaten track that led to environmental degradation and global warming -- issues we are grappling with today. He cited that, Albert Einstein once said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." To that end, he pointed out that the AIIB must leverage the collective experiences of their MDB partners and member countries to support innovative infrastructure projects that could be financially viable, environmentally friendly and accepted by the local communities.

He further stated that the AIIB would act as a facilitator in this capacity. Innovations in projects from one country could then be leveraged in another, with a particular focus on transit and energy to help LLDCs improve trade and economic outcomes. LLDC countries could also access the AIIB's Special Fund that would provide grants to support and facilitate the preparation of projects to be financed by the bank in eligible member countries. It would mainly benefit the preparation of sovereign backed projects undertaken by national or local governments. In exceptional circumstances, he said, Fund resources might also be used for preparing innovative, complex, or cross-border projects that have significant regional impact.

In his statement, **Mr. Bambang Susantono, Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development of the Asian Development Bank**, recalled that, since 1990, more than a billion people in Asia and the Pacific had been lifted out of extreme poverty. While that was admirable to say the least, the fact remained that half of the world's poorest still lived in the region. This merely underscored the critical importance of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. And, however ambitious they could be, all participants must ramp up efforts to achieve the 17 SDG targets.

He said that people at the ADB stood ready to support their developing members in attaining these targets. Their new corporate Strategy 2030, which advanced their current Strategy 2020, would provide a more effective response to the SDGs and prioritize areas where they could enhance their operations and deepen partnerships with their member economies for more sustainable impacts guided by the 2030 Agenda.

One area that had been clearly driving inclusive growth and poverty reduction was international trade. For developing Asia, the strong value-added derived from trade-related activities would continue to contribute to future economic growth and development. The ADB's Regional Cooperation and Integration Strategy would support the cross-border infrastructure, investment and financial integration integral to a regional framework promoting trade.

Mr. Susantono pointed out that the ADB was facing a challenging global environment—the trade growth

slowdown now compounded by rising protectionism. Guided by the ADB Strategy 2020, they had provided active support for trade facilitation—through regional, sub-regional, and other programs that could foster cooperation and promote international best practices. While much progress has been made, he underscored that the ADB must work harder to expand trade capacity. Trade infrastructure remained the most important barrier to expanding trade capacity and improving trade flows, particularly for least developed, landlocked and island economies. The ADB recognized that the region's trade competitiveness would depend critically on efficient, fast, reliable, and seamless infrastructure connections, which constituted one of the main pillars of ADB's Regional Cooperation and Integration strategy.

He stressed that investment in sustainable, resilient infrastructure in transport, energy, water and sanitation, among others, would be the prerequisite to further economic development and achieving SDG targets. Asia's infrastructure needs had been large and would only grow. The ADB's latest report on "Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs" said that, from 2016 to 2030, developing Asia would need to invest \$26 trillion -- or \$1.7 trillion a year -- to maintain the region's growth momentum, eradicate poverty, and, importantly, respond to climate change. According to him, this accounted for 5.9% of the projected gross domestic product of developing Asia.

Narrowing the infrastructure gap between current investment and future needs would require new public finance, far greater private sector investment, and innovative sources of long-term capital. Through reforms, the public sector could bridge up to 40% of the gap, but the rest should be borne by the private sector. He pointed out that multilateral development banks, which financed just 2.5% of the regions' infrastructure investment needs, must cooperate to better leverage not just capital, but their collective knowledge and expertise in supporting both public and private sector infrastructure investment.

In his statement, **Mr. Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General of International Road Transport Union**, pointed out that, in today's globalised economy, professional road transport would no longer merely be a mode of transport, but a vital production tool interconnecting every business to all world

markets through its unique, high quality door-to-door service. He said that, with efficient road transport, landlocked countries would turn into land-linked countries, and thus efficient supply chains would allow for regional economic integration and achievement of the SDGs.

However, there would quite often be barriers that could hinder effective road transport, and thus growth. He mentioned that the results of the IRU New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) that monitored commercial deliveries of goods by road on various itineraries, including through landlocked countries showed a competitive potential for the development of trade, but highlighted that over 57% of road transport time was lost at borders due to inappropriate procedures. Moreover, some 38% of transport costs were for illicit payments due to the environment, conducive to corruption, created by long border waiting times.

He then presented the answer to procedural problems -- streamlining customs procedures through ratifying and effectively implementing the key UN multilateral trade and road transport facilitation instruments, in particular the TIR and Harmonization Conventions. The UN-OHRLS Vienna Programme of Action conferred to this, and, equally, the UN Resolution on Multimodal Corridors called on the implementation of the TIR Convention.

He further suggested that there had been many encouraging signs that more and more governments clearly saw the benefits and importance of UN Trade and Transport Conventions. Last year, P. R. China ratified the TIR Convention; Pakistan joined in 2015 and was on the brink of operationalising TIR. He then recalled that 70 countries were already implementing the TIR Convention. The IRU saw an ever increasing interest from Bangladesh and India and hoped that Viet Nam would follow suit.

He also pointed out that a further boost to the accession of the TIR Convention had been given by the recent entry into force (on 22 February 2017) of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), as 80% of the objectives of the TFA can be fulfilled by implementing TIR. In addition, it was important to further develop transport corridors in the GMS region, and it was therefore crucial to ensure adequate investment

and financing in hard and soft infrastructure. In this respect, innovative financing mechanisms would be needed similar to the IRU Model Highway Initiative (MHI).

The MHI aimed to design and build, in public-private partnership, an exemplary road section with ancillary infrastructure, such as secure parking areas, hotels and fuel stations, along with harmonised, appropriate procedures. The support of international financial institutions would be of the utmost importance, and IRU would call on them to support financing of sustainable transport infrastructure.

He concluded that, by implementing tried and tested UN Transport Conventions, such as the TIR and Harmonization Conventions, and by using sustainable finance in line with the MHI, landlocked countries would turn into effectively connected and prosperous land-linked countries.

B. Session on Initiatives to Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by Member States and Inter-governmental Organizations

In this session, Ministers and other senior representatives from member states and **Inter-governmental Organizations** presented statements on the initiatives that they were undertaking **to improve cooperation on transit, trade facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

In his statement, **H.E. Mr. Humayoon Rasaw, Minister of Commerce and Industries of Afghanistan**, stated that Afghanistan had been reviving its role as part of the historic Silk Road and transforming itself into a roundabout between two emerging economic hot spots, connecting Central Asia to South Asia for further regional cooperation, energy transformation, trade facilitation, and improving transit. In this respect, Afghanistan had already taken some very remarkable steps by either initiating or completing a number of highly important regional connectivity projects. Among others, the most important are

regional energy integration projects, including the CASA1000 electricity transmission project, the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) natural gas pipeline, and the TUTAP (Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) electricity transmission line. These projects helped realize the notion of One Belt One Road more effectively.

He said that he was pleased to report that the implementation of TAPI project had started; the Chabahar Port agreement was signed; the first cargo train fully stocked with goods from eastern China arrived at Hairatan Rail Station – Northern Afghanistan; many infrastructure and energy projects had reached to their implementation phase. This had been the result of remarkable and tremendous efforts of all government officials, policy makers, business community, civil society and other key stakeholders of the Afghan government involved in improving cooperation on transit, trade facilitation and sustainable development for better future.

The government of Afghanistan had been actively working on reducing costs and time required to transport and transit products by developing alternate transit routes such as Chabahar Port, Lapis Lazuli Corridor, and Air Corridors to the world's markets. Fortunately, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor was inaugurated last year which will ensure Afghanistan land access to Europe through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

Moreover, he pointed out that, to further simplify, harmonize and streamline border crossing and transit procedures and meet the multi-lateral trading system standards, Afghanistan became 164th member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on 29 July, 2016. He also recalled that, in order to increase the effectiveness of transit procedures and benefit both neighbouring LLDCs and transit countries, Afghanistan ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Afghanistan strongly believed that the WTO rule based platform could serve to promote greater regional trade with regional partners and facilitate transit for Afghanistan's landlocked economy. He said that Afghanistan encouraged other nations, in the region and globally, to join the multi-lateral trading system and take advantage of its privileges.

In order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals

and contribute to the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan strategized its National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) with the objectives of stability, regional cooperation, and sustainable development. One of the key objectives addressed by this plan was strategic investment in infrastructure and technology; backed by a robust and well-regulated financial sector that can channel money to where it can best be spent.

In his statement, **Mr. Hon Romi Gauchan Thakali, Minister of Commerce of Nepal**, stressed that international trade agreements, especially under WTO, enabling cross-border flows of goods and services, had been an important spur to the global economy, significantly reducing both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. The cross-border flows of trade and finance had been a powerful source propelling global growth and could be attributed to lifting millions of people out of poverty, in particular from the developing world.

He suggested that LLDCs like Nepal had to overcome tremendous challenges due to the high trade costs, constraints related to supply-side capacity, and climate change. In this regard, the LLDCs and transit developing countries should make greater use of the Trade Facilitation Agreement by filing necessary notifications to get technical assistance, especially upgrading any international accreditation testing facilities and laboratories, and support for capacity building, including that of private sector.

He affirmed that the Government of Nepal had been fully committed to enhance mutually beneficial cooperation with its transit neighbours on transit and trade facilitation. He also added that speeding up processes by expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit would have positive effect on Nepal's trade.

As an LLDC, about 90% of Nepal's trade was transported by road. Nepal had the lowest road density in the region. Cost of export per container in Nepal was USD 2,545, which was higher than LDCs average of USD 2,084 and more than double of the OECD average of USD 1,070. Therefore, he said that quality of road infrastructure and improved cross-border connectivity, among others, was the key to reduce trade

cost and building competitiveness thereby helping LLDCs like Nepal to transform into land-linked country as envisaged by the Vienna Program of Action 2014-2024. Nepal had focused on infrastructure development mostly road network, as country has geographical diversity.

Nepal had initiated for upgrading road infrastructure and port as well as the construction of Container Freight Station (CFS) with support of the World Bank and is adopting facilitation measures in collaboration with other development partners.

The Minister indicated that with the advent of ICT and E-commerce, it had created historic opportunities for Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operated by women and marginalized communities to participate in both regional and global value chains, thereby contributing to reduction of poverty and achieving the targets envisaged by Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

He suggested that, to realize the benefits of globalization and participate in Global Value Chains (GVCs), Nepal would need investment in infrastructure development, especially transport and energy. These would be the key sectors, among others, to reduce trade costs in Nepal. Lowering trade costs could help Nepal join Global Value Chains. This would enable SMEs in Nepal to "move up" to higher value-added activities. He said that the rivers of Nepal offered substantial hydroelectric potential. Out of the estimated 43000 MW feasible capacity, Nepal had currently less than 1000 MW of installed capacity. This little-tapped resource could be developed to meet the energy demands of the region. He believed that Nepal and its development partners and neighbours could harness this renewable energy resource for the benefit of the region through cooperation and synergy.

He further pointed out that, with the promulgation of new Constitution of Nepal in September 2015, Nepal had been successful to institutionalize the democratic pluralism based on rule of law. Nepal appreciated the goodwill, support, and cooperation from the larger international community in their drive towards political stability, economic growth, and development. The Government of Nepal had been bringing a series of regulatory reforms to enhanced enabling environment for businesses and private sector. The GoN had

successfully brought about its third generation DTIS (Nepal Trade Integration Strategy 2016-2020). Recent progress on improving enabling environment, such as the endorsement by the Parliament of some bills like the Industrial Enterprise Act and Special Economic Zone Act, are important steps toward this goal.

Another crucial act, the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, he indicated, was being reviewed which has provisions to establish a one-stop window to provide all the facilities for foreign investors to come, get registered, get approved, and move forward with making their investments. He said the international community could collectively accomplish sustainable development goals with greater collaboration, coordination, and through enhanced integration by utilizing regional initiatives, such as Regional Motor Vehicle agreement. He also pointed out that overcoming infrastructure bottlenecks and promoting connectivity in terms of road and railway networks, air-links, ports as well as communication networks must receive top priority on our agenda.

In his statement, **H.E. Dr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Planning and Investment of the Lao PDR** noted that his Government had increased investments in infrastructure development -- particularly roads and railways linking the country with the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks though the implementation of various bilateral and multilateral agreements, including sub-regional road networks and economic corridors in order to facilitate trade, investment and tourism in the region.

Moreover, he said, the outstanding achievement was the accession of the Lao PDR to the WTO in early 2013, which led to the deepening of economic integration into the regional and global economies and resulted in the substantial increases in trade and services. He mentioned that the Lao PDR would continue to integrate its economy into regional and global economy through making economic and legal reforms in line with WTO requirements and regional arrangements, especially those under ASEAN Economic Community Blue Print; important steps were also being made in the area of business environment, and SME competitiveness. He said that the chairmanship of the ASEAN last year, in particular, provided a great opportunity for the Lao PDR to deepen their relationship and

greater partnerships with their neighbouring countries.

He highlighted that his Government had made the decision to view their country as a “Land-linked” country, and not just a “Land-locked” country, in order to make breakthrough in the area of trade facilitation. For this, he pointed out that Trade Facilitation was of paramount importance. The Lao PDR had recognized that they would need to reduce the costs of trading in order to ensure the competitiveness of their exporters as well as the overall economy. He stressed that efforts were being made to introduce automated information systems for customs clearance, along with more modern risk management techniques at the border to reduce clearance times and improve the efficiency of revenue collection.

Dr. Chanthaboury further pointed out that encouraging steps had been taken to improve inter-agency border coordination through the establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Secretariat, the approval by Cabinet of a National Trade Facilitation Strategy and Action Plan, establishment of the first-ever trade information portal – the Lao Trade Portal (LTP) designed to provide traders with information needed for importing and exporting goods, and recent adoption of comprehensive roadmap for import export process simplification and harmonization.

He recalled that, with achievements made over the years, the Lao PDR had also been facing a few key challenges associated with high logistics and trade facilitation costs, partly due to a landlocked supply chain and how they were leveraging Aid for Trade to improve their competitiveness through improving trade facilitation and enhancing regional and international economic integration.

In particular, he pointed out that, while significant gains in the efficiency of logistics and trade facilitation along the Lao PDR’s key transport corridors had been achieved, costs remained relatively high, which was partly associated with imbalanced trade and high frequency of movement of empty containers. It was also partly associated with poor infrastructure, inadequate transit facilities, insufficient human resources in areas of logistics and trade facilitation, cumbersome border crossing procedures in both the Lao PDR and transit countries, as well as low level of au-

tomation and harmonization of customs procedures. Non-tariff measures had been increasingly seen as binding constraints for effective transit transport system in the sub region.

He added that, as a least-developed, landlocked country, the Lao PDR had been facing significant challenges to provide efficient transit services to neighbouring countries, to promote multimodal transport operation and mitigate the negative impacts caused by the landlocked supply chain of the country. He pointed out that the Lao PDR's future support and efforts to transit, trade facilitation, and the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development would focus on the following key areas:

- Further develop and enhance the capacity of the road network while maintaining the existing infrastructure;
- Develop an efficient regional transport network to increase competitiveness;
- Improve transport-related legislation and country capacity in order to facilitate cross-border and transit transport;
- Strengthen the capabilities of the National trade Facilitation Secretariat and National transport Committee as part of efforts to improve coordination among agencies with border management responsibilities;
- Mainstream Trade and Transport Facilitation across relevant line ministries;
- Work towards the simplification, harmonization and modernization of trade and customs procedures;
- Implement WTO, ASEAN, GMS and bi-lateral trade commitments;
- Develop private sector capacity to trade efficiently in compliance with rules and regulations;
- Automate and reform substantive import export and transit procedures in order to improve consistency and performance standards; Ensure and enhance the sustainability of the Lao Trade Information Portal as part of efforts to make import/export procedures more transparent and predictable for the private sector;
- Explore opportunity to reduce transport cost by facilitating creation of full integrated cross border logistic operations and others.

In his statement, **Mr. Samson Uridia, Head of the Department for International Relations, Georgia Revenue Service, Tax and Customs Administration - SPS Border Control Agency, of Georgia** indicated that harmonization, simplification, standardization and modernization of transit rules and documentation were driving principles of Georgia's reforms. The freedom of transit had been ensured by the Georgian legislation, the transit was set to be free of any customs duties. What was the most important, according to him, was that it did not require a guarantee in a form of surety, deposit, or other monetary or non-monetary means. Nevertheless, since Georgia was a Contracting Party to the TIR Convention, economic agents involved in trade could provide a guarantee in a form of the TIR Carnets in the Georgian customs crossing point of entry, albeit this would not be mandatory by the Georgian national legislation. The e-visa procedure had been in place which enabled simple obtaining of the document for the drivers.

He pointed out that the Integration in the European Union was the cornerstone of Georgia's foreign and internal policy. Effective implementation of Association Agreement between EU and Georgia had been very important for political association and gradual economic integration with the EU. Correspondingly, prospective accession of Georgia to the Convention on the Simplification of Formalities in Trade in Goods, and the Convention on a common transit procedure and preparation for the implementation of the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) had been envisaged as the top priority in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy of Georgia 2020. With Georgia's strategic interest to promote its role as the transit hub for the region, it became the 11th country to join the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) project. He hoped that Georgia's participation in CAREC would increase synergies in the region and strengthen economic ties through regional cooperation.

He recalled that, the Prime Minister of Georgia presented a government project on construction of the transport network linking all regions of Georgia in September 2016. Plans included the construction and reconstruction of railway stations, ports and airports, as well as construction and renovation of the tourism infrastructure. In total, by the year of 2020, construction and reconstruction would be conducted on 1000

km of highway at an approximate cost of 3.5 billion USD. Separate plans were dedicated to the implementation of Universal Internet Program that would make internet available additionally for 800,000 people, the construction of Anaklia Deep Sea Port in west Georgia, and one of the most important ones for the region -- Tbilisi-Baku-Kars railway, which was in full swing for 2017. He wanted to use this opportunity to present Georgia's gratitude to the customs colleagues of Azerbaijan and Turkey for their willingness and dedication to create the effective, coordinated and modern customs control mechanism based on trilateral cooperation, which would facilitate the competitiveness of this sub-region and Euro-Asia region.

He mentioned that Georgia had free trade regime with EU, CIS countries, and Turkey. The free trade Agreement was also signed with EFTA countries, and the country would become the contracting party of Pan-Euro-Mediterranean cumulation of preferential rules of origin in the near future, which would enable the country to implement the diagonal cumulation among EU, EFTA, Turkey and Georgia. The negotiation of free trade Agreement was finalized with the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong China.

He pointed out that the Parliament of Georgia had ratified the Protocol of Amendment to insert the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement into Annex 1A of the WTO Agreement on November 27, 2015 and the instrument of acceptance for the Protocol was officially deposited with the WTO on January 4, 2016.

In his statement, **H.E. Ambassador Michael B. Christides, Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO)**, pointed out that the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization was the oldest regional entity promoting economic cooperation - in the broadest sense of the term - among its 12 Member States and beyond. He reminded that the BSECO was celebrating its first 25 years of service this year. He said that the celebrations would culminate with the BSECO Summit Meeting, which would be hosted in Istanbul, in May 2017.

He pointed out that the region covered by BSECO Member States was straddling two continents -- Asia and Europe. Efforts to establish better, faster, and easier connectivity corridors between them, were

on the forefront of efforts by many actors, whether public or private. He recalled the efforts to re-establish the "Silk Road" between the two Continents -- the modern concept of the camel caravans of old times, yet with the same aims and objectives: to facilitate communication, economic and cultural exchanges between States, as well as efforts to open up the economies of land-locked countries. In this context, he mentioned that, whatever progress the BSECO was -- or, would be -- able to achieve in implementing infrastructure projects that facilitate the transport of people and goods, these accomplishments would also directly support the objectives of International Organizations and national governments in the greater region, since the BSECO's activity did not take place in a vacuum, but in a way and manner that integrated it to existing multinational Transport projects, European or Euro-Asian.

For instance, the BSECO's road infrastructure project called "the Black Sea Ring Highway" referred to coordinated efforts of our Member States for upgrading to "European" standards almost 7.5 thousand kilometres of highway around the Black Sea, connecting its main ports and all the capitals of the BSECO Member States. According to him, some parts of this Ring Highway were ready, while more were still under construction under the initiative and supervision of their respective Members, and others were in the stage of planning.

He added that, another major project, "Motorways of the Sea", referred to coordinated efforts in the upgrading of port-infrastructure, the implementation of good practices, increasing compatibility and inter-connectivity of traffic control systems, as well as safeguarding free and fair competition in international shipping. He stressed that almost 43 ports, not only in the Black Sea, had expressed interest in participating in this ambitious project.

Mr. Christides also suggested that constant efforts were aimed at diminishing red tape and bureaucracy when it came to moving goods and people across land or sea borders, by harmonizing and simplifying procedures, formalities, and the necessary documentation. He explained that countries might build the best of highways, yet if they did not streamline the above bottlenecks, they would only end up continuously losing time, profit, and patience.

The BSECO always sought and enjoyed fruitful cooperation with many international partners, such as the UNECE, the UNDP, the OSCE, the CEI, the TRACECA, the Danube Commission, the IRU, the IRF, the BSEC-URTA, the BASPA, and other international organizations. Especially, he underlined established partnerships based on concrete joint projects and actions with regard to road transports, with the IRU and the BSEC Union of Road Transport Associations (BSEC-URTA).

In addition, he underscored that, despite the obvious difficulties, given the overall situation in the wider Black Sea region, the BSECO would aspire to assume a greater role in promoting the concept of international intermodal transport corridors, in order to facilitate trade and ensure greater regional integration. In this effort, the BSECO would be looking forward to increase their synergy with all other interested stakeholders, to promote Public-Private Partnerships and to attract the interest of International Financial Institutions.

In his statement, **Mr. Mircea Ciopraga, Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA)**, introduced that the activities of the TRACECA that are aimed at promotion and expansion of trade-economic and transport relations between Europe and Asia, as well as realization of economic opportunities of the TRACECA member states through development of transport infrastructure of the TRACECA corridor. He explained that the TRACECA, was the international transport corridor Europe-the Caucasus-Asia, including transport systems of 13 member states of Central Asia, Iran, South Caucasus and Turkey, as well as 4 countries of the Eastern Europe which signed the Basic Multilateral Agreement TRACECA being the legal framework of our activities.

On the other hand -- he added -- the TRACECA had been the programme directed to the development of economic ties, trade and transport communication in the region via supporting political and economic independence of the countries by means of expanding their opportunities to have access to European and world markets; further expansion of regional cooperation between the TRACECA countries. He said that the TRACECA highly appreciated the activities of the

structures functioning under the UN aegis and other international organizations which were engaged in trade facilitation and simplification of border crossing procedures.

He highlighted that one of the priority areas of TRACECA activities consisted in taking measures on simplification of border crossing procedures. At this stage, the TRACECA countries launched and vigorously implemented the "Single Window" concept at the road border check points, specifically the work on the implementation of new technologies and equipment renewal at check points, which in its turn beneficially impacted the time of goods delivery and performance of traffic.

He mentioned that the TRACECA was interested in constructive cooperation between the countries in the region and its common objective was to render support in the implementation of international conventions and the introduction of engineering standards within the framework of cooperation with the TRACECA's member states. He reminded that in order to implement important transnational projects in the field of transport, there would be the need of mobilization of considerable human and material resources. Making joint efforts, could attract attention to these issues and purposefully contribute to making corresponding decisions and achieving significant results. With the view of assisting in the implementation of relevant legal acts with participation of experts engaged in trade facilitation and border crossing simplification issues, Mr. Ciopraga thought it would be useful to arrange joint trainings and educational courses, particularly within the framework of implementation of the 2014-2024 Vienna Programme of Action wherein a number of our member states took interest. In this regard, he said that the TRACECA was ready for full-fledged cooperation with UN-OHRLLS.

In his statement, **Mr. Ho Quang Trung, Director of Market Integration Directorate, Economic Community Department of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, noted that ASEAN membership consisted of least developed countries, landlocked and transit developing countries. The ASEAN, therefore, recognised the importance of equitable and sustainable economic development as an integral part of the region's growth strategy. In this connection, the ASEAN had been committed to

strengthening their cooperation with other regional and international organisations, as well as development partners, to support the full implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The ASEAN regional economic integration had consistently contributed to the realisation of the goals as set out in the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was envisioned to create a deeply integrated and highly cohesive ASEAN economy with a more equitable, inclusive economic growth, and enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation. These objectives were being translated into concrete strategic plans of actions for the period 2016 – 2025 in various sectors in line with and in support of the vision and goals of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 which aimed to connect the ASEAN Member States in the areas of sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility.

He pointed out that, for the ASEAN, the movement of goods in transit played a crucial role to promote trade and ensured sustainable development throughout the region. ASEAN Member States concluded the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit (AFAFGIT) in 1998 and the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Inter-State Transport (AFAFIST) in 2009 to simplify and harmonise transport and customs procedures for goods in transit and inter-state transport of goods. The ASEAN Framework Agreement on Multimodal Transport (AFAMT) was concluded in 2005 to facilitate the development and operationalisation of efficient multimodal transport services adequate to the requirements of international trade. These agreements, once fully implemented by all ASEAN Members, would provide a harmonised and concrete legal and institutional framework governing transport, customs, immigration, and other trade-related procedures in the region.

Mr. Trung noted that on trade facilitation, significant progress had been made with a view to reducing time and cost of doing business within the region. This was the outcome of on-going process of simplification, modernization of customs and trade related procedures, transparency enhancement of nontariff measures, harmonization of standards, technical

regulations, and negotiations for mutual recognition arrangements. These had been pursued through regional trade facilitation initiatives such as the Rules of Origins Self-Certification Pilot Projects, the ASEAN Trade Repository, the ASEAN Single Window, the ASEAN Customs Transit System, and the ASEAN Solutions to Services, Investment, and Trade.

He also highlighted that much work remained to be done to fully realize the AEC 2025 objectives, including the enhancement of the movement of goods in transit and trade facilitation measures in the region. The ASEAN envisaged many challenges due to constraints on resources, technical expertise and capacity to be able to tackle different issues ranging from the institutional framework to physical infrastructure development and he urged international organisations and development partners to foster cooperation with the ASEAN at the regional level or with individual ASEAN Member States to implement successfully the AEC Blueprint 2025, the VPoA, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In his statement, **Mr. K. L. Thapar, Chairman of the Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD)** mentioned that the Institute, as a part of its activities, promotes the concept of regional transport corridors, undertakes inter-country studies and provides trainings to professionals from landlocked and developing countries free of cost.

He pointed out that the AITD had actively advocated and worked towards the evolution and implementation of helpful and simple transit, as well as trade facilitation policies and measures. The AITD also highlighted their key role in poverty alleviation. Based on empirical studies, it had highlighted the need for making rational intermodal choices that would promote sustainable development in the world.

He noted that these efforts had encouragingly borne fruit. The concept of corridor-based development had received acceptance. Additional seaports had been nominated for the Exim trade of landlocked countries. Third country seaports had also been agreed for this purpose. In this regard, he referred to the nomination of seaports in Bangladesh for Exim trade for Nepal transiting through India. He said that transport professionals from Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan were being brought into the mainstream of knowledge and

realms of technology. The Institute would continue to assist Afghanistan in the development of its inter-country transit routes, rail network, dry ports, and importantly, trade facilitation measures. He pointed out that it was for the first time in history Afghanistan had a choice of alternate land-cum-sea routes for its Exim trade. The Institute had been articulating that liberalized trade would be an important instrument of economic development and poverty alleviation.

C. Session on Enhancing Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Mr. Amb Macharia Kamau, Permanent Mission of Kenya to UN, Special Envoy of the UN President of the General Assembly on SDGs Implementation and Climate Change, pointed out that we were living in times of multiple complexities and incredible uncertainty – from climate change to geopolitical instability; from social unrest to the changing face of employment. He noted that in 2015, all 193 UN Member States adopted a masterplan to transform the world for the better: 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which, by 2030, seek to: End poverty and ensure access to opportunity and basic services for all; Tackle climate change and catalyse the transition to a green economy for shared prosperity and a flourishing environment; and Take major leaps forward for equality, peace and justice worldwide.

He highlighted that the LLDCs faced development challenges owing to their geographical disadvantage of lacking territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets. Due to the long distances from the sea and necessary transit through neighbouring countries, coupled with cumbersome border-crossing procedures and inadequate transit transport infrastructure, the LLDCs faced disproportionately high transport and trade transaction costs which were almost double that of the coastal countries. This eroded their competitiveness, as well as affected economic growth and their overall sustainable development.

He indicated that the 2030 Agenda, the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognized that the LLDCs faced specific challenges and deserved special attention -stressing

the importance of trade as a key means of implementation. Yet, the LLDCs were not able to fully harness their trade potential because of the special challenges. He stressed that there is need for effective co-operation of the LLDCs and transit developing countries in order to help reduce the high transport and trade costs that the LLDCs faced.

He pointed out that some of the key areas where the LLDCs and transit countries could enhance their co-operation include: infrastructure development and maintenance in particular transport, energy, and ICT; implementation of the legal framework that make clearance of goods faster; improvement and harmonization of customs procedures and standards; harmonization of policies between the LLDCs and transit countries. He also noted that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement that entered into force on the 22nd of February 2017 had big potential to reduce trade costs and delays including passage of goods and streamlining of border procedures. There was need for rapid implementation of the Agreement by all the WTO Members States in order to realize its benefits. He underscored that the High-Level Political Forum would constitute an opportunity for LLDCs to report and evaluate actions up to date and to seek scale up commitments, especially to enhance regional integration and cooperation.

He indicated that although poverty in LLDCs countries had gradually reduced, the proportion continues to be higher compared with the average of developing countries. Among priority actions, LLDCs would need to improve access to sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneurial opportunities, and productive resources; provide universal access to basic social services; progressively develop social protection systems to support those who could not support themselves; empower people living in poverty and their organizations; address the disproportionate impact of poverty on women; work with interested donors and recipients to allocate increased shares of ODA to poverty eradication; and intensify international and regional cooperation for poverty eradication.

With regard to SDG2, the fight against hunger had progressed over the past 15 years. Globally, the prevalence of hunger had declined, from 15 percent, according to figures for 2000 to 2002, to 11 percent, according to figures for 2014 to 2016. However, more

than 790 million people worldwide still lacked regular access to adequate amounts of dietary energy. If current trends continued, the zero hunger target would be largely missed by 2030. Ending hunger and malnutrition would rely heavily on sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices. To increase the productive capacity of agriculture, more investment would be needed, both public and private, from domestic and foreign sources.

On Goal 3 on healthy lives and Goal 5 on gender equality he said they were more than individual goals and are cross-cutting for successful achievement of sustainable development. Trade facilitation and cooperation could only be successfully utilized with a healthy workforce and where women were able to fully participate in the economy of a country. With regards to the SDG 3 on health, LLDCs had made some progress towards reducing under-five mortality rates. However, he also pointed out that the current rate was higher than the average for the developing world. On the SDG 5, over the period 2000 to 2015, women's representation in national parliaments and local governments had grown from 7.8% in 2000 to 26% in 2016. Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married by age 18 estimated to be 35.4% in 2015 was high in LLDCs, compared with the world average of 25.9% or average for all the developing countries of 27.4%, indicating the need to address this challenge. While progress had been made, it was evident that LLDCs would need to invest heavily in the health and to ensure gender equality in their respective countries.

He then stressed his concern of the SDG 9. Infrastructure provided the basic physical systems and structures essential to the operation of a society or enterprise. Industrialization had driven economic growth, created job opportunities, and thereby reduced poverty. Innovation had advanced the technological capabilities of industrial sectors and prompted the development of new skills. However, industrialization remained a vital factor to boost LLDCs' transformation and sustainable development. He indicated that the nature of LLDCs' economic growth till date had been mostly based on the primary sector of the economy (extractive industries and agriculture). The expected next step of substantive development would be a progressive shift towards more productive sectors of the economy, mainly industrial manufacturing

(secondary sector) and services (tertiary sector).

However, in the global context, no country could meet these challenges alone. LLDCs' efforts to maximize domestic resource mobilization should be supported from a revitalized global partnership for development in line with the VPoA, the International Development Framework, and the world that traversed the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other commitments pertaining to finance, technology transfer, capacity building, and market access must be fulfilled in a timely manner.

LLDCs to implement comprehensive policies for infrastructure development and maintenance; Promote sustainable transit systems through upgrading and maintenance of networks; development of corridors along transit routes; cross-border mechanisms, including one-stop border crossing; and economies of scale for transport systems through intermodal transport, inland container depots, dry ports, etc; Harmonize gauges to facilitate regional connectivity; Promote multilateral and regional permit systems for road transport and expand multilateral quota systems among LLDCs and transit countries.

He pointed out that the SDG 14 had been one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that were universally adopted by all 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2015. The Ocean Conference that had since been mandated by the United Nations to support the implementation of the SDG 14 was the first giant step down the road to Ocean's recovery. Success of the Ocean Conference would be crucial to the universal push for implementing all the SDGs given the vital role that the Ocean played in our world.

He then indicated his understanding of global investment corresponding to the SDG 17. With estimates suggesting that implementing the SDGs would require annual investments of between US\$5-7 trillion, it was clear that sustainable financing would be critical to efforts to drive implementation of the SDGs on the scale necessary for them to be reached in the next 14 years. Achieving this would require that all sources of finance be tapped into, and that all partners work together coherently and collaboratively.

He pointed out that it was important that there had

been close collaboration with International Development Banks and the United Nations to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the global sustainable development agenda. He also stressed that we could not solve today's problems with yesterday's tools. It would require a transformation of society through rapid, continuous, and disruptive innovation on a massive scale.

He highlighted several actions related to Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI). First, accelerating universal internet access had been the key. The faster we could offer full internet access to the world population, the sooner we could accelerate implementation of the Goals. Second, the world could overcome major challenge through innovation – challenges like access to nutritious food, sustainable energy, digital financial services, online education, or sanitation services, etc. Mr. Kamau would like the meeting participants to consider which major challenges to implementation of the Goals they could take on and solve over the coming years. Third, he also suggested building dynamic partnerships between innovators, political leaders, and policy makers in response to the Goals. He pointed out that the UN had a number of existing initiatives that might interest the participants and that he would be happy to connect them with those initiatives.

He underscored that with regard to Official Development Assistance (ODA), development partners and multilateral organizations have a crucial role to play in supporting the efforts of LLDCs to achieve sustainable development and eradication of poverty. Existing commitments would need to be fulfilled, while ODA should fully take into account the specific situation of each country.

He also indicated the important role of Aid for trade in assisting capacity-building for LLDCs on the formulation of trade policies, implementation of trade facilitation measures, development of trade-related infrastructure, and linking them to global and regional value chains. He noted that South-South and triangular cooperation would also have a role to play in increasing the growth and development of LLDCs, as well as transit developing countries, through contribution to sharing of best practices, human and productive capacity-building, financial and technical assistance and technology transfer. He stressed that

organizations and bodies of the United Nation system, relevant international organizations, regional development banks, regional economic integration organizations and other relevant regional and sub-regional organizations were requested to provide technical assistance and capacity-building for the implementation of the VPoA. He underscored that the private sector could contribute to build and strengthen LLDCs' productive capacity, export growth, technology transfer, diffusion of productive know-how and skills, employment generation, infrastructure development, and opening up of new markets for high-value added products and services.

He also pointed out that a meaningful push for the implementation of all the 17 SDGs had been a priority of the 71st Session of the UNGA. SDG implementation could provide humanity with unique opportunities to build partnerships and alliances across all sections of the national and local communities for peace, harmony, development and prosperity. In this regard, he inform that we should advocate for regional, national and local strategies and plans for delivery of the SDGs. Actions in the villages, towns and cities to achieve the SDGs supported by partnerships or alliances of local authorities, businesses, civil society, academia and government would accelerate the pace of achieving the SDGs for the goodness of all people.

He further mentioned that achievement of the SDGs would also require active engagement of the young and old – women and men at the community levels – together with their local and national government support institutions. For this, they would need to be knowledgeable about the SDGs. It could be of great benefit for the government when the SDGs were achieved, as prosperity would be better than deprivation.

Mr. Thangavel Palanivel, UNDP Chief Economist for Asia and the Pacific region, recalled that the 2016 report of the UN Secretary General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals highlighted that poverty, undernourishment, and under-five mortality rates in LLDCs were about 100, 76, and 46 percent higher, respectively, than the averages of developing countries. This, according to him, showed that development deprivation had been more severe and thus achieving of the SDGs would be much more challenging in LLDCs than, averagely,

in other developing country. This also showed that the strategy to achieve SDGs could not be business as usual.

He underscored some the critical challenges that LLDCs were facing: Weak economic growth -- LLDCs had been hit hard by low commodity prices and low demands. As a result, their growth decelerated to less than 3.0 percent recently. Even with high economic growth in the last decade, LLDCs had failed to achieve several MDGs. Such a low economic growth meant lower employment growth, lower government revenue, and lower per capita income, thus slowing down the SDGs progress. Lack of inclusive development -- Many LLDCs confronted the challenge of creating more and better jobs for their growing youth labour force. Unemployment rates among youth and women had been high and rising. The lack of access to employment opportunity and the lack of access to basic services aggravated prevailing inequality and exclusion. Increased vulnerability to natural disasters -- In the last decade, frequency and intensity to adverse weather events and natural disasters increased. Growing demands for water, energy, and food had also exacerbated the existing shortages.

He further explained how LLDCs and the transit countries could cooperate further to enhance the SDGs implementation in these challenging circumstances. He noted that development experience showed that enhanced cooperation between LLDCs and their transit countries had been a smart strategy to overcome many of the problems faced by the LLDCs. Such a regional cooperation could not only be an ideal approach to reap efficiency gains, exploit economies of scale, and sustain economic growth, but it could also be critical for supporting effective SDGs implementation at the national level. The 2030 Agenda recognised the importance of regional cooperation, integration, and interconnectivity. SDG 9 explicitly called for an enhancement of cross-border measures such as the development of regional and trans-border infrastructure connectivity.

By building seamless cross-border connectivity, intra-regional supply chains, and stronger financial links, regional economic integration could play a key role in accelerating economic growth, narrowing development gaps among countries, reducing poverty, raising productivity and employment, and strength-

ening institutions. He stressed that such regional cooperation could also help LLDCs to overcome constraints arising from small domestic markets and allow them to reap the benefits of scale economies, stronger competition and increased investment. Recent sluggish growth in LLDCs had underlined the urgent need for investment on economic diversification and value addition to achieve sustainable economic growth. Such economic diversification and value addition wouldn't happen unless LLDCs and transit countries worked together in enhancing regional and trans-border physical infrastructure connectivity (roads, transport, power, ICTs) and soft infrastructure connectivity (policies and institutions to promote trade facilitation, skilled migration, and investment). Unless they work together, regional and global value chains, which could be a key for building resilience to economic shocks and to sustain development momentum, wouldn't happen. In this context, he highlighted the immediate needs in improved cross-border connectivity and trade facilitation measures.

Effective regional cooperation could also provide financing for regional public goods, facilitate trade flows, and attract investments into key sectors. It could also provide excellent opportunities for information exchange and peer-learning in social, economic, and environmental affairs. It could also provide a platform for facilitating the national harmonization, comparability of statistics and data, and monitoring progress, and ensuring accountability. Regional economic and social cooperation could also reduce political conflicts and wars. Strategic gains were also important when LLDCs negotiated with transit countries as a unified group in multilateral trade agreements.

Environmental and climatic issues such as river pollution, air pollution, and glacier melting were by nature cross-border issues, which could not be effectively addressed individually but were best tackled in a cooperative framework. Regional environmental cooperation and joint resource management efforts could slow or reverse the degradation of natural resources or to promote more efficient and more equitable use of existing regional resources. Such cooperation could further help provide or protect regional public goods (like environment, river water, and migration) and improve developmental and environmental efficiency gains.

As most of the poor lived and worked in rural areas and in the agriculture sector in LLDCs, sharing markets, energy, investment, ideas, technology, and skilled labourers would be key for improving agricultural productivity, promoting rural industrialisation and financial inclusion, and thus achieving inclusive development.

Mr. Palanivel also highlighted how UNDP had been supporting LLDCs in implementing the SDGs agenda. He said that: UNDP supported SDG implementation through its co-ordination role -- coordinating UN Country Teams and others in delivering integrated solutions; UNDP facilitated countries' to access relevant knowledge, expertise, technology, and resources to implement the SDGs through South-South and Triangular Co-operation; UNDP also supported countries to establish a broad SDGs alliance involving national and sub-national governments, legislators, civil society, NGOs, the private sector, and other stakeholders; and UNDP also supported countries in integrating the 2030 Agenda into their national planning and budgeting framework. It also supported LLDCs in monitoring, reporting on, and applying lessons learned from SDG implementation, as it did for MDGs. It also supported LLDCs in building their productive capacities, mobilising financing for development, and building the resilience of people, communities, and countries to be able to withstand shocks.

Ms. Nguyen Le Thuy, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Investment and Planning of the S.R. of Viet Nam, gave a presentation on Enhancing Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Viet Nam. She first highlighted the achievements that Viet Nam had made and the challenges the country was facing with regard to the MDGs and SDGs. She noted that on SDG 1: Poverty rate using the new national poverty line 2011-2015, declined from 14.2 percent in 2010 to 4.5 percent in 2015. On SDG 2, the hunger rate dropped dramatically over the past fifteen years and chronic hunger as a phenomenon has been eradicated in most provinces in Viet Nam. SDG 3: The Under-five Mortality Rate halved between 1990 and 2014 while the Infant Mortality Ratio (IMR) fell rapidly by 2.5 times over the same period. HIV prevalence had been reduced to under 0.3% of the population. Viet Nam had achieved the goal for controlling malaria since 2011 with the proportion of malaria-related deaths standing at only 0.01 per 100,000 people in

2012. Viet Nam had also achieved significant progress in the reduction of the maternal mortality ratio.

With regards to SDG 5, she noted that by 2014, there was no significant difference between literacy rate and education attainment across all educational levels between males and females. In higher education (university and colleges), the percentage of male and female lecturers were close to equal. Ratio of wages (the wage gap) between male and female workers in non-farm sector had been narrowed to 106.7% in 2014. SDG 17: Viet Nam had achieved solid results in developing a global partnership for development. The past years had witnessed rapid liberalization of trade; a number of major Free Trade Agreements had been signed, with the more recent ones driving deeper integration of Viet Nam within the global economy.

Ms. Nguyen also alluded to the following challenges Viet Nam was facing. Low-value added and labour intensive activities predominated, and there was limited technology transfer. Major social and demographic changes, including increasing migration, urbanization, ageing, and a growing middle class was causing greater inequality. Poverty had been reduced significantly but remained prevalent in remote and mountainous areas and in ethnic minority communities. Reductions in ODA created difficulties in the government's financing of several social and economic activities. Climate change had become more visible with more frequent natural disasters, causing considerable damage to human lives and property. Natural resources had been degrading. Environmental pollution had also been increasing. Institutional framework for SDG monitoring, reviewing, and reporting was still weak.

She then highlighted several key points regarding the development of National Action Plan (NAP). She pointed out that there was a cross-sectoral drafting team chaired by Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment with members from the National Assembly, the Government Office, and relevant ministries/agencies, for the NAP. The NAP was developed simultaneously with the review of the existing development strategies, policies, programs, plans against 17 goals and 169 targets. The Viet Nam's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (VSDGs) targets had been selected based on the combination of review findings, proposals of ministries/agencies, and discussion in consulta-

tion workshops.

She advocated the engagement of all the stakeholders in reviewing the strategies, and policies, to develop the NAP. She also recalled that a range of consultation workshops to review 17 SDGs that were held during August and September 2016. The draft NAP had been sent to all stakeholders for comments (ministries/agencies, provinces, civil society, UN agencies, embassies/bilateral development cooperation partners and international organizations). Furthermore, the draft of the National Action Plan had been submitted to the Prime Minister for approval in November 2016.

Ms. Nguyen also alluded to the overall objective to 2030. She stressed that sustaining economic growth would be in parallel with ensuring social progress and justice and ecological environment protection, effective management and utilization of natural resources, proactive responds to climate change; ensuring that all citizens fully develop their potentials, participate in and equally benefit from development achievements; building a prosperous, peaceful, inclusive, democratic, equitable, civilized, and sustainable Viet Nam.

She further highlighted the key tasks to be implemented during 2017-2020: (i) Improve the institutional system and improve efficiency of state management on national sustainable development; continue to improve the legal system, policies and mechanisms by amendment, supplementation, and promulgation of new legislations to ensure an adequate legal framework to implement the NAP and the SDGs. (ii) Preparing of Action Plans of ministries, sectors, localities, institutions, organizations during the course of 2017, in order to implement VSDGs to 2030; (iii) Undertaking communication, advocacy and education activities in order to increase the awareness of the entire society of SDGs. (iv) Strengthening the capacity of personnel, ministries, sectors, localities, institutions, organizations in the implementation, mainstreaming, oversight, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development goals. (v) Preparing and issuing specific targets and a roadmap for the implementation of SDGs until 2030; preparing and issuing a system of statistical criteria for sustainable development, a mechanism for data collection for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of Viet Nam's SDGs. (vi) Mainstreaming sustainable development

goals during the formulation of annual socio-economic development plans of the country, strategies, policies, master plans of ministries, sectors, localities, agencies. (vii) Developing human resources, particularly high quality human resources, for all sectors in order to serve the national development cause in line with sustainable development goals, with special focus on the contingent of leaders and policy makers. (viii) Overseeing, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of sustainable development goals.

She highlighted the key tasks to be implemented during 2021-2030: Making increased efforts in mobilizing and effectively utilizing all domestic and external resources to implement SDGs; Completing the development of the database on SDGs, the mechanism for data collection to support the monitoring, reviewing and reporting of SDGs; making public and sharing information on the implementation of SDGs with relevant stakeholders in order to effectively tap on the database and use it for policy-making; Making continued efforts in developing human resources; Strengthening research on and application of science and technology, and technology transfer to support the implementation of SDGs, with particular attention being given to environmental, clean and new energy technologies; and Making continued and effective efforts in monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of SDGs.

She then pointed out Viet Nam's implementation measures, in response to the abovementioned tasks. Increasing the entire society's awareness of and action for sustainable development and Viet Nam's sustainable development goals is vital. Mobilization of the participation of the entire political system, all ministries, sectors, localities, institutions, businesses, mass and social organizations, population communities and development partners in the implementation of sustainable development goals is crucial. Strengthening the role of the National Assembly, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and its member organizations in monitoring and giving social feedback on the implementation of VSDGs. Mobilizing increased financial resources, domestic and external, to support the implementation of the NAP. Greater strengthening of the leadership, guidance by various levels of government, sectors and the coordination between leading agencies and supporting agencies, political and social organizations, professional associations, business

communities, non-government organizations as well as the coordination between central agencies and local agencies in the implementation of sustainable development goals, in order to ensure the synergy and integration of the goals. Enhancing international cooperation during the implementation of sustainable development goals by all countries; taking an active part in and undertaking activities of sharing lessons/experiences and increasing the capacities to implement sustainable development goals; ensuring an active participation of and proactive coordination with the international community in addressing global and regional issues/problems as well as other challenges to the implementation of sustainable development goals.

She then reviewed the SDG indicators. She pointed out that 129 of the 230 indicators were feasible; while 101 of the 230 indicators were infeasible. Several possible cases include the lack of methodology, methodology available but being not clear, indicators with new concepts, indicators requested new forms of disaggregation and needed a lot of time to collect research solutions, alternatives). Regarding the current database availability, she mentioned that 89 of the 230 indicators had available data; while 141 of the 230 indicators did not have available data. 30 indicators had been integrated into the 2015 Statistics Law.

She introduced the Monitoring and Reviewing Mechanism of Viet Nam. The Mechanism included several important entities -- the Government, the National Council for Sustainable Development, MPI / Line Ministries, Provinces / Local Authorities, and Social Organizations / Business Sector.

She also talked about the next steps for VSDG monitoring and reviewing which include: Develop VSDG indicators (concepts, contents, calculation methods to ensure the national ownership of data); Setting up of VSDG indicators monitoring system; Adding VSDG to national statistic list; Developing the online indicator information systems for SDG monitoring and reporting; Enhancing capacity of statistics for SDGs (staff of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) and other line ministries, sectors as well as local level); and Mobilizing technical and financial support for monitoring and reviewing.

She suggested recommendations to support the

full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These recommendations were related to Statistical Capacity Building, Finance, Technology, Energy and Response to Climate Change, Stakeholder Engagement, and International and Global Partnership.

Interactive discussion

In the interactive discussion, participants underscored the importance of mainstreaming the SDGs into their national development strategies and policies. They commended the efforts that Viet Nam was doing to integrate and implement the SDGs. They underscored the importance of sharing experiences and lessons. They also noted that the VPoA could be integrated into the national strategies together with the SDGs.

D. Session on Cooperation on Transit Infrastructure Development and Transit Corridors: Best Practices, Challenges and Opportunities

The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) -- H.E. Ambassador Michael B. Christides, Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat, BSEC PERMIS, expressed his gratitude and congratulated organizers of this very important and timely meeting. He presented the initiatives undertaken by the BSEC Organization and recalled that the BSEC Organization would celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2017. He said that BSEC attached particular importance to transport and trade facilitation sectors.

He pointed out that that the region covered by BSEC Member States was straddling the two continents, Asia and Europe and three of the Member States were landlocked countries. He stressed that whatever progress the BSEC was -- or, would be -- able to achieve in implementing infrastructure projects that facilitate the transport of people and goods would also directly support the objectives of International Organizations and national governments in the greater region, since the BSEC's activity takes place in an integrated manner with existing multinational transport projects.

For instance, the Organization's road infrastructure project called "the Black Sea Ring Highway" referred to coordinated efforts of the Member States for upgrading to "European" standards almost 7.5 thousand kilometres of highway around the Black Sea. According to him, some parts of this Ring Highway were ready, while more were still under construction under the initiative and supervision of their respective Members, and others were in the stage of planning. Sub-projects of this initiative include the promotion of intermodal transportation, of road ancillary infrastructure, the introduction of a common PERMIT System and introduction of the International Vehicle Weight Certificate.

He added that, another major project, "Motorways of the Sea", referred to coordinated efforts in the upgrading of port-infrastructure, the implementation of good practices, increasing compatibility and interconnectivity of traffic control systems, as well as safeguarding free and fair competition in international shipping. He stressed that almost 43 ports, not only in the Black Sea, had expressed interest in participating in this ambitious project.

Mr. Christides also suggested that constant efforts were aimed at diminishing red tape and bureaucracy when it came to moving goods and people across land or sea borders, by harmonizing and simplifying procedures, formalities, and the necessary documentation. He pointed out that the BSEC Organization's specialized Working Groups – on Trade and Economic Development and on Customs Matters – are preparing the Trade Facilitation Strategy for the BSEC region, which is expected to be finalized and adopted in the very near future, thus an important achievement for marking the 25th anniversary of the BSEC.

He emphasized that the BSEC seeks further fruitful cooperation with many international partners. Especially, he underlined established partnerships based on concrete joint projects and actions with regard to road transports, such as with the IRU and the BSEC Union of Road Transport Associations (BSEC-URTA). He also underscored the successful cooperation with the UNECE, along the ambitious provisions of our bilateral Agreement, which has been concluded in 2001.

In addition, he underscored that, despite the obvious difficulties, given the overall situation in the wider

Black Sea region, the BSEC would aspire to assume a greater role in promoting the concept of international intermodal transport corridors, in order to facilitate trade and ensure greater regional integration.

He finally stressed that the BSEC's presence in the meeting offered an opportunity to learn about the experiences of other regional organizations and benefit from their lessons learned. At the same time, the BSEC is ready to cooperate with any interested stakeholders, in order to jointly plan and execute projects of common interest, organize workshops, and seminars on issues covering transports and trade facilitation. In this respect, the BSEC had accumulated precious experience and many international organizations had already cooperated with the BSEC in organizing important meetings in Istanbul.

Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) -- Mr. Mircea Ciopraga, Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of TRACECA, first underscored the importance of the meeting in strengthening international cooperation in transport and power industries. He said a prospective idea to develop the TRACECA transport corridor was based on the ancient "Great Silk Road". Over the past 24 years, the TRACECA transport corridor, located partly in Europe and partly on the border with the countries of East Asia and Middle East, provided an alternative to the intercontinental trans-oceanic corridor by its overland routes passing across the countries of the Black and Caspian Seas' basin, South Caucasus, or through Iran and Turkey. Transit attractiveness of the corridor created a huge potential to attract freight flows, and therefore to develop economies of the region's countries.

He recalled that the volume of freight traffic within the corridor routes for the period 2013-2015 was more than 225 million tons of goods and the volume of goods transported by road along the TRACECA routes had been growing every year on average by 4-5%. He pointed out that the TRACECA countries focused their efforts on further dynamic development of the transport corridor, with key measures identified in the TRACECA Master Plan for 7-year period, which was adopted at the recent Twelfth Meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission TRACECA held on 1 June 2016, in Odessa, Ukraine.

He added that up to date, within the TRACECA Programme, the European Commission had financed 85 projects to total amount surpassing 187 million euros, with more than 40% of the budget allocated to the support and development of transport infrastructure within the TRACECA corridor.

He highlighted that the improvement of transport infrastructure had been of key importance for TRACECA countries, most of which are landlocked, but noted that transport networks in many countries require modernization which would require considerable financial resources. He said that public funds would not satisfy the needs of financing such large-scale projects and that TRACECA promotes participation of private sector in financing and management of transport projects, in particular Public-Private-Partnerships. He pointed out that, with the aim of ensuring more active information exchange and cooperation of TRACECA countries with potential investors, TRACECA held two International Investment Forums in Brussels with participation of concerned international investors and donors.

He noted that the improvement of transport infrastructure within the TRACECA corridor went on in parallel with taking measures to ensure free movement of goods and passengers, critical issues for solving the transport problems of the landlocked countries. With the view of promoting the attractiveness of the TRACECA corridor compared to other alternative routes, the countries took active measures to eliminate non-physical barriers, including through harmonization and simplification of regulatory standards, facilitation of border crossing procedures, use of advanced transport and information technologies, and others. Mr. Ciopraga stressed that TRACECA developed Guidance on Border-Crossing Procedures, a useful instrument for transport operators performing transit traffic in the region.

He recalled that the TRACECA Multilateral Permits System for international road carriage of goods was developed and implemented and permits had already been disseminated in the member countries of the TRACECA Permit System and had been used by international hauliers since 1 January 2016. In addition, amendments were made in November 2016 to cancel a number of restrictions, which positively impacted the transport services market and led to the

rising of demand in the permits among road hauliers.

He mentioned that TRACECA constantly recommends its countries to accede to and to promote the effective implementation of international legal agreements, directed to ensuring efficient international freight traffic. Besides, TRACECA maintains cooperation with the IRU in the area of implementation of the preliminary electronic declaration system TIR-EPD in TRACECA countries.

He stressed that the involvement of TRACECA countries in modern logistic networks is key for further development of the TRACECA corridor and that more efficient multimodal transport chains could increase competitiveness of the whole TRACECA transport corridor and economic development of the whole region. He said that a single multimodal transport document was elaborated within TRACECA.

He noted that since more than 95% of freight traffic between Asia and Europe was performed by maritime transport along the transoceanic route, re-orientation of a part of containerized freight flows to overland corridors is critical to integrate TRACECA corridor into world transport systems. He noted that container traffic along the TRACECA corridor increases annually and that it was a great achievement of private operators and of some initiatives of railways administrations.

As a rule, the main part of the container cargo turnover was earlier performed in the basin of the Black Sea and the western part of Turkey in the basins of the Sea of Marmara and the Mediterranean (in this area for the last year there was transported more than 300 thousand containers). But the situation began to change, namely:

Some recent developments include the creation in October 2013 of a Coordination Committee for development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, designed to provide transport communication between China and Europe. Along this route from China, the container block train "Nomad Express" was recently launched and since August 2015 several trips had been organized, with the expectation that the container train would run regularly this year.

Mr. Ciopraga concluded by stating that internation-

al transport corridors had become nowadays key mechanisms of globalization of the world economy and TRACECA generates within its routes one of the important arteries of the continent.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) -- Mr. Ho Quang Trung, Director of Market Integration Directorate, Economic Community Department, ASEAN, introduced the position of ASEAN. He emphasized that cooperation on transit infrastructure development and transit corridors is one of the basis ideas for ASEAN economic development and integration as it plays a crucial role in the movement of goods, services, capital, and people among the Member States. It also provides great support in binding ASEAN's economies closer together and in building the ASEAN Economic Community. He noted that since 1990s, several regional transport agreements had been concluded that focused on, among others, the development of infrastructure (such as the ASEAN Highway Network), the facilitation of goods in transit and inter-state transport.

Mr. Trung noted that the ASEAN Highway Network (AHN) represented the vision for the physical connectivity for efficient facilitation of transit transport and inter-state transport by road vehicles, linking all ASEAN Member States by connecting 23 designated national highway routes, with a total length of 38,400 km. Besides strengthening physical connectivity, the movement of goods in transit among ASEAN Member States had been facilitated by the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Goods in Transit (AFAFGIT) which set out a package of trade facilitation measures to support transportation of goods in transit. He mentioned that the intention of the AFAFGIT was to simplify and harmonise transport, trade, and customs regulations, as well as to establish an effective, efficient, integrated, and harmonised transit transport system in the ASEAN.

He said that the ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS) was currently being developed, to act as a catalyst for the implementation of AFAFGIT, with the aim of implementation of full end-to-end computerisation of transit operations using single electronic customs transit declaration. With the ACTS Pilot Project, free movement for trucks carrying goods would be soon realised among the three Pilot Countries, namely Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Thereafter, the sys-

tem will be rolled out operationally, and eventually extended to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and, Viet Nam.

He recalled that the launching of the ASEAN Economic Community on 31 December 2015 was an historic milestone, which resulted in a more open market, improved investment regimes, improved physical infrastructure networks, and deeper integration into the global economy. Through this initiative, he emphasized that the ASEAN attached importance to upgrading roads to higher quality standards, improving intra-regional trade and providing onward connections to the Asian and European Road Network, improving connectivity for landlocked countries. He said that the ASEAN also underscored the need to coordinate on prioritisation of national infrastructure projects to be aligned with those priorities set under regional cooperation.

He stressed that it was imperative to build upon existing initiatives and focus on possible collaboration in a number of areas consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Kuala Lumpur Transport Strategic Plan 2016-2025 in order to strengthen connectivity between Europe and ASEAN regions for the benefits of landlocked countries. These, according to him, may include enhancing transport infrastructure, networks and operations; exploring possible cooperation on advancement of the Intelligent Transport System and Global Navigation Satellite Systems utilisation for transportation processes management; and expanding knowledge sharing, capacity building and joint programmes in areas such as advances in transport network systems, transit transport operations and transit infrastructure development.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) -- Mr. Jean Baptiste Mutabazi, Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, COMESA, began his presentation by explaining that out of 19 countries of the COMESA, 8 are LLDCs. He noted that COMESA's main activities concentrate on its five main corridors, focusing on developing bankable projects.

He mentioned that the COMESA just like other regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa, was using the corridor approach in the development and management of infrastructure and management of international traffic. He highlighting the benefits

brought by the corridor concept, including coordinated infrastructure development, maintenance and management; standardization and harmonization of infrastructure, equipment, policies and skills development; harmonization of legal framework; information sharing, performance monitoring and efficiency improvement; development and promotion of a shared vision and joint resolution of problems.

He also gave insights into some COMESA treaties, including on Transport and Communications, on Roads and Road Transport and COMESA Protocol on Transit Trade and Transit Facilities. He noted that other legal agreements on transit transport cooperation that have been put into place include Regional Model Legislation on OSBP, Corridor Agreements, Bilateral Agreements and Inter-railway Agreements.

Mr. Mutabazi listed some transit challenges that COMESA countries had been facing, including long queues at borders, delays in clearance at borders, unsecured open bulk cargo, and fuel tankers tampering. He also mentioned the regional challenges which stood between traders and the realisation of cost and time reductions, which range from lack of political will, governance, laws and regulations, compliance, weak inter-agency collaboration to complicated trade procedures, document requirements, numerous different ICT systems and technology infrastructure inadequacy, barriers in inter-operability, difficulty in trade data exchange and limited connectivity within and amongst countries.

He highlighted the transport transit instruments that have been developed by COMESA, which have already been contributing to facilitating trade in the region. These include: the Yellow Card Scheme, COMESA Carrier License, COMESA Transit Plate, Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Bond Scheme, COMESA Customs Document, COMESA Transit Plates, Harmonized Transit Charges, One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), Vehicle Dimensions and the COMESA Virtual Trade Facilitation System currently being implemented which will help put all the tools that have been developed into one place.

Mr. Mutabazi concluded by highlighting the challenges the COMESA was facing in domestication of harmonized policies and regulatory regimes across countries; clearly setting out guidelines and proce-

dures on regional basis; dealing with protectionist tendencies by some Member States; the enforcement mechanism and capacity constraints.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) -- Mr. Eric Sidgwick, Country Director of Viet Nam Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank, started by highlighting key points of ADB's engagement. Firstly, he stated that the ADB's support to its member states was anchored in the global agendas. Secondly, he stressed that regional cooperation and integration was one of the founding pillars of ADB's support, based on cross-border infrastructure, improving trade and investment, helping to deepen capital and financial markets, and providing regional public goods. The ADB also had experience in sub-regional cooperation programmes. Thirdly, he said that the ADB was infrastructure bank, focused on transport, energy, and other hardware, but it also focused on sustainable transport. Fourthly, ADB had been supporting Transport and Trade Facilitation (hard and soft infrastructure) in all its sub-regional programmes. Fifthly, on financing, he stated that as a Multilateral Development Bank, the ADB is trying to catalyse resources from donors, but also from the private sector and suggested that institutions could also help intermediate savings that are in this region.

Mr. Sidgwick then highlighted five lessons learned from the ADB experience:

1. It is important to have good analysis of trade and investment flows and what the economic incentives are in each sub-regions. For example. Corridors are already in place, but not all of these entities have the incentives lined up.
2. It is important to match hardware with software, including in terms of timing. Mutual agreements need to be agreed, and also implemented in practice.
3. Regional and bilateral agreements need to be mutually consistent with higher up international agreements.
4. Preparation of bankable projects that are implementable is key and the ADB can provide that support.
5. Partnerships are critical. The ADB is providing analysis, finance, and support to hardware and software, as well as towards making projects happen on the ground.

Asia Pacific Institute of Mongolia -- Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, gave his presentation, with a topic of Mongolia-China-Russia Economic Corridor: Infrastructure Cooperation and Regional Economic Development.

He started by introducing parts of the Mongolian Government's Action Plan related to infrastructure cooperation and regional development, namely Mongolia's Sustainable Development Vision 2030 which aimed for Mongolia to become a transportation "bridge" between Asia and Europe and the Action Program Of The Government Of Mongolia For 2016-2020 which focuses on enhancing multilateral cooperation in transportation and developing transit transportation through joining regional integration processes in infrastructure and transportation.

He also highlighted the Mongolia, China and Russia Summits on the Trilateral Economic Corridor. The first summit, focusing on economic cooperation, was held in September 2014, at Dushanbe, Tajikistan; the second summit, in which the three countries agreed to create economic corridor, was hosted in July 2015, at Ufa, Russian Federation; and the third summit, where leaders of the countries signed the Program of Economic Corridor, was in June 2016, hosted in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The Trilateral Economic Corridor integrates Mongolia's Steppe Road, Russia's Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) and REPR corridor and China's Silk Road and the One Belt, One Road (OBOR).

He then illustrated the idea of Connectivity between Asia and Europe from the Mongolian perspective, with the aim to become a transportation "bridge" between Asia and Europe. He noted that Mongolia supports the initiative of transport corridor development in the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTR), including in Eastern Mongolia as this is crucial for the development of GTR and Mongolia. The Program of the Trilateral Economic Corridor will include development of studies on Tumen River Transportation Corridor project, also referred to as "Coast-2" corridor (Choibalsan-Sumber-Rashaan-Ulanhot-Changchun-Yanji-Zarubino). Mongolia is also engaging in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with countries to attract investments and facilitate trade and services.

He then depicted the structure of the Western, Central and Eastern Railway Transit Corridors and the AH-4, AH-3 and Eastern Road Transit Corridors going through Mongolia. Mr. Baasanjav then underscored the challenges in implementing the Trilateral Economic Corridor, namely identifying priority projects; financing of the projects, especially of priority projects and called for combination of financing from national, government, private, PPP and multilateral sources. He highlighted a few sources such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS New Development Bank, SCO Interbank Consortium, Silk Road Fund and other national and multilateral financial institutions.

He also noted the many agreements that needed to be ratified and implemented in order to create an enabling legal environment, including the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the WTO, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Asian Highway Network and Agreement between Governments of Mongolia and Russia on renovation and strategic development of Ulaanbaatar railroads, as well as ongoing integration to regional economic cooperation initiatives.

He finally defined the options for the corridor management structures for the trilateral economic corridor. At the regional level, the options include an intergovernmental committee between the three countries or Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation structure; at the national level a joint investment planning centre or national trade and transport facilitation committee and at the corridor level the participants include state-owned companies as well as private companies.

Viet Nam -- Mr. Tran Viet Ha, Deputy Director General of Ministry of Transportation of the S.R. of Viet Nam, first pointed out that enabling and effective legal framework is important to facilitate cross-border transport. He emphasized that cooperation in the development of transit transport infrastructure and transit corridors is one of the important elements of Viet Nam's engagement in international cooperation forums. Viet Nam's transit role in the region's transport system is reflected in the objectives of developing international transport corridors going through Vietnam, with a focus on developing transport infrastructure to connect to neighbouring countries, including China, Laos and Cambodia.

He mentioned that Viet Nam had been negotiating, signing and implementing many international treaties on cross-border transport and transit, including, particularly, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as well as several regional agreements such as Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport between Greater Mekong Sub-Region Countries, ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Goods in Transit, ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Inter-State Transport and ASEAN Framework Agreement on Multimodal Transport. He stated that Viet Nam was also a party to the Agreements on Trans-Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Network. In addition to multilateral agreements, Viet Nam concluded series of bilateral agreements, including road transport agreements with Laos, Cambodia, and China, as well as water and rail transport agreements.

He said the plan for transport development in Viet Nam was based on the aim of enhancing connectivity within sub-regions as well as between Asia and Europe and with other countries around the world. He recalled that Viet Nam had been involved in the development of multimodal transport and economic corridors and completed many infrastructure project connecting economic corridors in Viet Nam with its neighbours, as well as dry ports. As for logistics development, he noted that Viet Nam approved master plans for the development of systems of goods warehouses at the borders with China, Laos and Cambodia. Viet Nam had also been enhancing connectivity through one stop border posts and single windows.

Regarding transit transport, he said that Viet Nam, with more than 3,000 km of coastline, had been part of many routes from landlocked countries and landlocked regions of China. He stressed that Viet Nam had been giving priority to development of transport and simplifying transit on corridors. However, he pointed out that cross-border transport between Viet Nam and other countries was still facing challenges. The quality of road infrastructure systems was still low, transport connections to seaport needed to be further upgraded and lack of infrastructure and legal framework for effective multi-modal transport, lack of high-quality logistics services such as dry docks, logistics centers and highway stops, as well as lack of resources for transport infrastructure investments. He stressed that the implementation of agreements

on facilitating transport in ASEAN and the GMS was slow. He also noted the complex nature of cross-border transport, which has to look at issues such as transnational crimes, trade frauds and smuggling.

He concluded by arguing in favour of closer cooperation between countries as well as with international organizations to facilitate connectivity and cross-border transport and recalled that it was with this aim that Viet Nam participated in the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015.

Interactive discussion

In the interactive discussion, participants emphasized that geography should not determine the fate of LDCs. Participants highlighted that corridors should not only include all modes of transport, but also ICT connectivity. It was noted that COMESA is making efforts to combine infrastructure projects with other connectivity projects, such as laying down fibre-optic cables while developing roads. It was also mentioned that COMESA has developed many transport facilitation instruments based on international practices that are now being implemented in the region.

Specific questions included what other initiatives have been undertaken in the ASEAN region to integrate countries in Asian transit system and whether there are any plans to encourage ASEAN members to join and use the TIR system. It was highlighted that there is the ASEAN single window initiative which connects the Member's national single windows and enabled electronic exchange of border documents in order to facilitate trade flows. In addition, the ASEAN customs transit system is being piloted amongst Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, with the hope that it can be rolled out in other countries including Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam soon.

The participants discussed the great achievement of reaching from China to London in 18 days by overland freight train and its significance in re-establishing the ancient Silk Road. It was also noted that in the TRACECA region, the operationalization of a block train from China to Georgia which started in 2015 is a big achievement, with the aim to expand the railway to Europe. Participants highlighted that connectivity between Europe and Asia should have many routes, including by road, rail and sea, with all routes complementary to each other. It was also noted that third

country ports to be utilized for the purposes of transit traffic for LLDCs should be encouraged.

E. Session on Enhancing Cooperation on the International Trade and Trade Facilitation

In his presentation, **Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships, at World Bank**, indicated that trade facilitation has been important because it could have a major effect on reducing trade transaction costs. The goal of trade facilitation had been to have fast, fair, predictable, and transparent processing and clearance of imports and exports, at lowest transaction cost to the trading community, thus reducing time and cost and increasing predictability.

He recalled that a major milestone for the global trading system was reached on 22 February 2017 when the first multilateral deal concluded in the 21-year history of the World Trade Organization – the Trade Facilitation Agreement – entered into force by obtaining the two-thirds acceptance of the agreement (110 members), from the WTO's 164 members. He indicated that the entry into force of the TFA was a remarkable achievement, and the World Bank Group strongly supported the TFA as a global effort to reduce trade costs and to help countries connect to the global economy. He further highlighted that TFA was particularly relevant for low-income countries and LLDCs where trade costs had been on average three times higher than those of advanced economies. He also said that the TFA was closely linked with the Bank's twin goals of eliminating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. He further said that by boosting global trade and expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit, the TFA would have huge potential to reduce trade costs and raise incomes.

He then explained how the World Bank Group had been supporting LLDCs and transit countries in this area. He indicated that the World Bank Group had been supporting countries' efforts to reduce trade costs and improve connectivity of LLDCs to the global economy through main coastal trade gateways, facilitating the regional trade of LLDCs with neighbours.

In addition, he indicated that the World Bank Group had been doing this with a focus on small-scale trade, supporting the diversification agenda of the economies, and supporting improvements in logistics services and trade-facilitation-related issues.

He highlighted that the central vehicle for the Bank Group's support had been the Trade Facilitation Support Program (TFSP), which was launched in June 2014 and co-financed by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He indicated that since its launch, over 60 countries had reached out for technical assistance and support to implement the TFA and to date, World Bank Group teams had met several dozen interested countries and had begun working directly with 32 countries, including Vietnam and other countries in the East Asia and Pacific region.

He indicated that the key feature of the TFSP had been its focus on assisting countries to design practical reform strategies, including the development of detailed reform sequencing plans that were consistent with country priorities, available resources, and local implementation capacities. He further indicated that the early results achieved by the TFSP were promising giving an example that Lao PDR had launched a trade information portal with the aim of increasing transparency and predictability, and ultimately boosting trade, investments, and growth in its economy. He informed that the portals utilized a generic software platform developed by the World Bank Group that was populated with information in an easily searchable form and provided all regulatory information on cross-border trade, including laws, regulations, prohibitions, restrictions, technical standards, applicable tariffs, fees, procedures for license and permit application and clearance, copies of all forms, and plain language instructions.

The launch of the trade portal was a step towards further alignment with the WTO TFA that required countries to publish trade-related information in an easily accessible and transparent manner. It would also assist traders and investors in complying with regulatory requirements associated with the importation and exportation of goods. He said that the TFSP had also been supporting the efforts of Timor Leste, Cambodia, and Mongolia to undertake Time Release Studies that helped identify key bottlenecks that impacted

the time it took for goods to move across borders. He stressed that hard data on trade facilitation performance mattered. He highlighted that as a result of data obtained through these studies, Timor Leste had reduced clearance times by 40 percent.

He further mentioned that the World Bank Group had been investing in LLDCs and their transit partners around the world, for example, they had been enhancing cooperation in trade and trade facilitation in the Great Lakes region, and enhancing existing customs modernization activities in Lao PDR. He further mentioned that the Bank was also promoting deeper economic integration between the Western Balkans and EU through a reduction in cost and time to trade and transport, while building better predictability of the trade and transport regimes.

He recalled that what the Bank had learned from experience that it would require a great deal of coordination, not only donors coordination but also in recipient developing countries themselves. He indicated that Governments were tasked not only with careful planning and coordination between various agencies involved in trade facilitation, but also with the private sector. He further indicated that, while individual reforms such as these were very positive and delivered immediate benefits to the trading community, global experience suggested that realizing sustainable trade facilitation gains would require comprehensive “whole-of-border” reform initiatives and effective cooperation, information sharing, and genuine collaboration among all border management agencies.

He further explained that it was therefore important that all border management agencies could work together to develop a common vision and a well-sequenced series of reform priorities and actions. He finally concluded that given the enforcement of the TFA, there would be a new momentum behind efforts to implement it fully and effectively – and the World Bank Group would stand ready to be a central part of this effort.

Mr. Raul Torres, Counsellor of WTO remarked that one of the best ways to promote the speedy implementation of the TFA was through its ratification. He informed that the TFA had entered into force on 22 February, 2017, which meant that the agreement took effect for those members who ratified the pro-

ocol. He indicated that those developed members that had ratified the TFA would have to implement all of the obligations in the agreement, while developing countries and LDCs would have to implement those provision they had included in their Category A notifications.

He informed that so far, a total of 113 members had deposited their instruments of acceptance and that this was an excellent progress, considering that the agreement had only been open for ratification for just a couple of years. He further indicated that the 16 LLDCs had ratified the Agreement. He however, highlighted that for LLDCs in the region, Afghanistan, Lao, Mongolia, and Nepal had ratified the Agreement. He further pointed out that, 21 transit countries had submitted their instruments of acceptance. He said that the picture was also very good for the region as they had received instruments from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

He indicated that it was important to remember that, as part of the process of implementation, developing country members had been submitting notifications of their Category A commitments, which were those measures that they were ready to implement or would implement on entry into force of the Agreement. He pointed out that it is important to take into consideration 3 key commitments important for the LLDCs and transit countries to work together to promote implementation TFA. He indicated that the three provisions were: Article 11 on Freedom of Transit; Article 8 on Border Agency Cooperation; and Article 12 on Customs Cooperation.

He recalled that the WTO had received 93 notifications of Category A commitments, including 17 from LLDCs. He indicated that according to the LLDC notifications only 3 would be ready to implement Article 8 on Border Agency Cooperation fully and 2 partially, and 7 would be ready to implement fully Article 12 on Customs Cooperation. On Article 11 on Transit, he indicated that only 6 LLDCs were ready to fully implement them while 3 could do so partially.

He also indicated that 30 notifications had been presented by transit countries and 7 of the transit countries have notified that they ready to fully implement Article 11 on Freedom of Transit, while another 8

would partially implement it. On articles on Customs Cooperation, 7 of the transit countries would be ready to fully implement Article 8 on Border Agency Cooperation, and 1 would partially implement it; while 9 reported that they would be ready to fully implement Article 12 on Customs Cooperation, and 1 would do so partially. He noted that these types of commitments should be of great benefit to the LLDCs and help facilitate trade.

He also indicated that Members also have been providing notifications of commitments in Categories B – those that would require a transition period, and C – those that would require technical assistance. He noted that only 9 Category B notifications and 8 Category C were received including 2 from LLDCs (Chad and Zambia) for both categories. He stressed that it was important for LLDCs and transit developing countries to indicate their capacity building needs, including by submitting notifications under category C, so they could take full advantage of the technical assistance and capacity building facilities available to implement the TFA.

On Aid for Trade, he recalled that Ministers recognized the importance of and continuing need for the Aid-for-Trade Initiative at the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Nairobi in December 2015. He indicated that the biennial Aid-for-Trade Work Programme for 2016-2017 responded to this mandate, by centring its activities on the theme of “Promoting Connectivity”. He further indicated that by focusing on connectivity, the current Aft-WP addressed supply-side capacity and trade related infrastructural constraints faced by LLDCs, particularly in e-commerce, services, and upgrading infrastructure.

Mr. Torres also mentioned that the WTO was preparing for the 6th Global Review on Aft which would take place in WTO from 11 to 13 July of 2017. He further indicated that as part of the monitoring and evaluation exercise conducted in conjunction with the OECD, the WTO had sent questionnaires to partner countries, donors, south-south partners, as well as the Regional Economic Communities and Transport Corridors. He informed that the community's reaction to the questionnaires had been very positive, and the WTO had received 63 responses from partner countries, 37 from donors, 3 from south-south partners, and 7 from RECs and transport corridors.

He further indicated that 16 LLDCs had provided their responses to the questionnaire, and the information contained was quite interesting. To give an example he indicated that all LLDCs that replied said that trade was a part of their national development strategies and that most of them identified export diversification, trade facilitation, and transport infrastructure as their Aft priorities. In addition he indicated that all responses also pointed out that trade facilitation was a priority in their national development policies. He also indicated that among the trade facilitation measures that were identified as needing more Aft support, LLDC respondents identified border agency cooperation, publication of information, release and clearance of goods, and freedom of transit. He further highlighted that on trade-related infrastructure needs, the responding LLDCs identified energy distribution, telecommunications and road transport infrastructure as their priorities.

He indicated that it is very interesting that LLDCs had identified border agency cooperation as the top priority for support as this measure was one of the areas where there was greater scope for benefits, and it was also an area that had been overlooked by the donor community. He expressed his hope that the Meeting and the aid for trade review would help in making donors realize the importance of providing support for border agency and customs cooperation.

Regarding the LLDCs' trade and achievement of the SDGs, Mr. Torres indicated that trade was recognized in the Agenda 2030 as an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction that could contribute to the promotion of sustainable development. He indicated that trade had been an important source of finance to both the private sector and the public sector in developing countries and that it could enhance a country's income generating capacity, which had been one of the essential prerequisites for achieving sustainable development. He pointed out that the LLDCs also realized the importance of trade as evident in the Aft questionnaires where all the responding LLDCs indicated that trade could make a contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, in particular, to the goals on industrialization, economic growth and decent work, reduction of inequalities and poverty elimination.

He highlighted the following policy recommendations as important for enhancing export performance of the LLDCs and contributes to the achievement of the SDGs by the LLDCs: Continue reducing trade costs through trade facilitation; Build supply side capacity and trade related infrastructure; Focus on export diversification and value addition; Enhance the services sector; Apply flexible rules of origin to increase utilization of preference schemes; Reduce the distortionary effects of non-tariff measures; Make e-commerce a force for inclusion; Address the shortfalls of micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs); and Deepen the Multilateral Trading System.

In concluding, he pointed out that the process had begun to identify potential deliverables for WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference which would take place in Buenos Aires in December, 2017. He indicated that some of the issues being discussed could be of benefit to LLDCs -- for example, reductions on agriculture domestic support, and how to harness the power of e-commerce to support inclusiveness. He indicated that the conversations at the WTO were still at an early stage and he advised that the LLDCs would have to remain engaged in the discussions, as any result in these areas would be strictly dependent on where members wanted to take them.

Hon Romi Gauchan Thakali, Minister of Commerce of Nepal recalled that Nepal's new inclusive and federal democratic constitution, promulgated in September 2015, envisioned the development of an independent, self-reliant, and prosperous economy, through joint efforts and engagement of public-private and cooperative sector as state's overarching economic policy. He indicated that the constitution also clearly specified 'to diversify and expand markets for goods and services, while promoting exports through development and expansion of industries upon identifying areas of comparative advantage'.

He noted that Nepal had undertaken a series of economic reforms over the last two decades, making Nepal one of the most liberal regimes in South Asia in these matters. He also informed that Nepal had also been emphasizing on simplifying procedures, enhancing transparency and efficiency, and building infrastructure to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

He pointed out that the Government of Nepal had successfully brought about the third-generation Diagnostic Trade Integration Strategy (DTIS) in the form of Nepal Trade Integration Strategy 2016-2020. He further pointed out that under policy initiatives, Trade Policy 2015, New Industrial Enterprises Act, 2016, Special Economic Zone Act, 2016 were some examples of Nepal's commitment to creating conducive investment environment and strengthen partnership with the domestic and foreign business community. He added that these policies were expected to be effective instruments in realizing the vision of achieving economic prosperity of Nepal by increasing trade sector's contribution to the national economy through export promotion, strengthening of supply-side capacities, and reducing trade deficits. He pointed out that Nepal would need to increase exports of value added competitive goods and services to international markets.

He also pointed out that Nepal had recently ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement contributing to the early enforcement of the Agreement globally. He further indicated that a National Trade and Transport Facilitation Committee consisting of both private and public sector representatives had been established with the mandate of facilitating trade. He highlighted that single window systems, integrated check posts, border point infrastructure development, among others, had received top priority in programs to facilitate international trade.

He indicated that Nepal had rationalized tariff structure and implemented the ASYCUDA World in major customs points and that they had also introduced export/import code and had carried out periodic review of legislation and reform. He further indicated that Priority had been given to enhancing capacity of customs officials and streamlining customs administration in line with the Customs Reform and Modernization Master Plan.

He stressed that, enhanced transport infrastructure had been critical for an LLDC, like Nepal and that unfettered transit transport to the nearest sea would be the lifeline of the economy. He expressed Nepal's gratitude to its immediate transit neighbours, India, China, and Bangladesh, for their understanding, goodwill, and support. He said that Nepal had been effortful to increase the connectivity for improving

trade and investment relations with their neighbouring countries, along with the South Asian region, through bilateral and regional mechanisms, such as the SAARC, the BBIN, and the BIMSTEC.

He further pointed that an agreement on transit transport and transport between Nepal and China was signed in 2015 whereas both Trade and Transit Agreements with India had been renewed recently. He added that Nepal could be the transit point between the two largest and fastest growing markets of the world, India and China. It may produce another big opportunity for Nepal to be linked in regional value chains.

He also proposed a few points which needed to be addressed by the meeting to address LLDCs' constraints and help them achieve the internationally agreed targets in a time bound manner. This, according to Hon Thakali, would help create a level playing field to the LLDCs in the international trade and enable them to materialize the objectives of VPoA and SDGs in true sense: SMEs in the LLDCs should be integrated with the international supply chain system so as to share the benefits of world business (trade and investment) and thereby achieve the objectives of the SDGs as well as the VPoA; The stringent trade regulatory measures and non-tariff measures (NTMs) should be rationalized to reduce the risk of marginalization of LLDCs; A need-based technical assistance is required to build quality infrastructures so as to unlock the infrastructure bottlenecks, equip human resources, and enhance productive capacity; Increase the connectivity of the services in regional level to help bring the countries together to improve the social and economic development indicators; and Support in the harmonization of rules, process and system between transit developing countries to facilitate cross border trade and transit.

He underscored that it would be necessary to increase the global and multi-stakeholder partnership for enhancing cooperation for international trade and trade facilitation with the effective and efficient implementation of the VPoA, the TFA, and the SDGs, as they are complementary to each other. He stressed that effective mobilization of financial resources and sharing of knowledge, expertise and technology would be essential in the realization of LLDCs' meaningful participation in international trade. He indicated that he

was confident that the important high-level meeting would contribute to the consolidation of our efforts towards ensuring that trade could work as an engine for development for all.

H.E. Mr. Humayoon Rasaw, Minister of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan indicated that the key development challenges faced by Afghanistan included challenges which are a result of landlockness as well as lack of regional cooperation and the limited capacity of the private sector. He pointed out that cooperation between the LLDCs and the transit countries was important to achieve sustainable development and to ensure that no one is left behind.

He indicated that Afghanistan has set five development goals to achieve sustainable development and he outlined them as follows: Trade facilitation: Afghanistan had developed an Export Strategy and had also identified the missing links which can enable integration into the international value chains and is negotiating bilateral trade agreement to enhance their market access; Coordination: Afghanistan was in the process of developing a coordination mechanism to enhance coordination at national level and with the international stakeholders; Partnerships: Afghanistan had just developed a PPP legal framework; Oversight: The country is ensuring that all systems to fight corruption were in place; and Infrastructure development: Plans for infrastructure development included the development of the dry port as well as turning the military zones into economic zones.

Interactive discussion

A representative of ICC-Asia thanked the Nepal and Afghanistan for creating a good business environment. She indicated that ICC was available to help other countries in their efforts to create a good business environment. She further indicated that ICC has set up a system for issuance of the Certificate of origin certificates and she invited countries to collaborate with ICC to use the system.

On the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, she noted that the Mr Raul Torres had identified three articles - Article 11 on Freedom of Transit; Article 8 on Border Agency Cooperation; and Article 12 on Customs Cooperation - as being important to facilitate movement of goods between the LLDCs and the transit countries. She advised that it would be important

to also consider Article 10 on Formalities connected with importation, exportation and transit and Article 23 on Institutional arrangements, particularly, establishment of National Committee on Trade Facilitation.

F. Session on Enhancing Cooperation on Legal Framework for Transit at Bilateral, Regional, and Global Levels

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) -- Mr. André Sceia, TIR Secretariat of Transport Division, UNECE, gave a presentation on the topic of International Conventions for Seamless Transit. He highlighted –intertwined relationships between sustainable growth, transit, facilitation, and compliance. He first stressed that LLDCs’ connections to global markets were necessary to ensure their sustainable growth and for this purpose transit should be facilitated as much as possible (on the basis of freedom of transit as per the GATT V and the WTO TFA Article 11). The trade facilitation part included the harmonization of border crossing procedures and data requirements both nationally and internationally and ensuring internationally recognized valid guarantees. Lastly, ensuring compliance is an essential the role of the customs administration and can be greatly improved by means of effective risk assessment, C2C information exchange, and advancing cargo information.

He said that ensuring sustainable growth by means of facilitating secured transit was among the objectives of the VPoA, 2030 agenda, and the TFA. Since the entry into force of the TFA, UNECE had examined which are the most relevant conventions that would help countries to implement the TFA. Two UN conventions, the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets (the TIR Convention, 1975), and the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods (the Harmonization Convention, 1982) stood out. He stressed that the joint implementation of those conventions would foster more trade, transit documents would be recognised internationally, border controls would be fewer and more transparent and cargo would be transported across borders in a faster and more reliable manner. They would also help countries build up smarter borders, lead to enlarged co-

operation for border crossing facilitation, increased revenue and more security.

He underscored the importance of the TIR Convention and the TIR system, which is the only global transit system and has been a key facilitation tool for international trade and transport for decades. It was formed in 1975 but had been regularly updated, according to the needs of customs and private sector. It has 70 Contracting Parties and is applicable to all modes of transport. He said that the Union Cabinet of India just approved ratification of TIR, so hopefully India would become the 71st Contracting party to the convention. He explained the functioning of TIR system by mean of an example, a transport from Minsk to Barcelona, which goes through 3 customs territories on a trip across 7 countries but only one TIR Carnet is necessary as a customs document and the proof of existence of an international guarantee . Mr. Sceia also recalled the importance of the 5 pillars of the TIR system, i.e. Secure Vehicles or Containers, International Guarantee, the TIR Carnet, Mutual Recognition of Customs Controls, and Controlled Access.

He also gave an introduction of the e-TIR project that will move the TIR procedure into fully electronic system. In early stage, studies and extensive documents on how the system could work electronically were elaborated, followed by pilot project stage, with two projects, Georgia-Turkey and Iran-Turkey, were finalized. In addition, there is also Group of Experts on Legal Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure which works on the legal provisions.

Mr. Sceia underscored UNECE and UNESCAP collaboration on promoting the TIR, including through recent project on promotion of exchange of data between customs administrations to further improve risk assessment, in collaboration with other regional commissions. He then introduced more details of the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods of 1982 (the Harmonization Convention), which has 58 Contracting Parties, mostly in Euro-Asia. The Harmonization Convention aims to facilitate cross-border transport of goods through nationally coordinated, internationally harmonized shorter, reduced formalities, and controls of goods at borders. The Harmonization Convention covers all goods moved across borders (exported, imported or in transit), all control services, all modes

of transport, specific provisions for certain transport modes and goods, and it also addressed certain issues with regard to vehicles and drivers. He noted that it focuses on medico-sanitary inspections, veterinary inspections, procedures for road transport, phyto-sanitary inspections, quality/technical controls, and procedures for rail freight.

The International Road Transport Union (IRU) -- **Mr. Jens Hugel, Head of Goods Transport and Sustainable Development, IRU**, first talked about the backgrounds of IRU, saying that IRU was a global organization that represented the road transport sector, active in over 100 countries. He pointed out that even though drivers of cargo vehicles often saw adequate roads with little traffic, transport is still delayed when they reach border crossings as drivers could be stuck at borders for weeks, wasting fuel and productivity.

He then gave more insights into the IRU's New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) which monitored more than 200,000 border crossings since 2008 and found that up to 57% of transport time was wasted at border crossings, while 38% of relevant transport costs could be seen as unofficial levies. This environment, according to him, could be conducive to corruption.

Mr. Hugel introduced some of the UN instruments that facilitated border crossing, noting that they are applicable and available to all UN Member States. He said that the TIR was one of the solutions to the Vienna Programme of Action, and the benefits of the TIR System include its potential success in connecting continents, saving time and money, providing customs guarantee, boosting exports, using real-time data exchange, and optimising intermodal transport.

He noted that countries had been actively participating in the program and mentioned China and Pakistan's recent accessions to the United Nations TIR Convention. (China acceded to the convention in July 2016, and Pakistan acceded to it in 2015.) He noted the historic decision taken by India to aim to accede to the TIR Convention.

He highlighted the results of a study which analysed and quantified the economic benefits of the TIR System in UN ESCAP countries. He stated that imple-

menting TIR in selected UN ESCAP countries would save \$35 billion in transit costs over a five year period and the economic benefit of implementing TIR was between 0.14% and 1.31% of national GDP. He urged countries that have not done so to join the TIR Convention.

He also underlined the importance of fostering paperless cross-border trade through the e-TIR Pilot. He said the IRU wanted to see the smooth border crossing, instead of long waiting on borders, so that the world could see economic advance.

The World Customs Organization (WCO) -- **Mr. Toshihiko Osawa, Technical Officer of Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, WCO**, first introduced the WCO to the audience – the WCO is an intergovernmental organization representing 180 custom administrations around the world. He talked about the complexity of transit for LLDCs, including the fact that at least 4 different customs offices are involved in one transit operation, multiple submissions of transport documents and that there was so many potential duplications.

The customs of departure in LLDCs would first be in charge of lodgement of Customs transit declaration and examination of goods. Next, the customs of entry in transit countries would be responsible for lodgement of customs transit declaration, furnishing guarantee, examination of goods, affixing customs seals, and notification to the customs office of exit. The customs of exit in transit countries would do examination of goods and discharge of guarantee. Finally, the customs of destination in destination countries would further take charge of lodgement of Customs declaration, examination of goods, collection of import duties, taxes and charges.

Therefore, he said that there was a lot of potential for harmonizing and improving the transit operations. He then highlighted three international agreements on transit, namely the GATT Article V, the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), and the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) – an International Convention for Customs Procedures.

He emphasized the Revised Kyoto Convention which provides a comprehensive set of uniform principles for simple, effective, and predictable customs pro-

cedures with effective customs control. He said that there was political momentum now with TFA coming into force and that the TFA and the RKC encourage development of further cooperation to facilitate transit cooperation, in particular Article 11 of the TFA which calls for cooperation with a view of enhancing freedom of transit, including with regards to charges; formalities and legal requirements; and the practical operation of transit regimes. He also highlighted the Recommended Practice 26 of the RKC Specific Annex E, Chapter 1 under which “Contracting Parties should give careful consideration to the possibility of acceding to international instruments relating to Customs transit...”

He mentioned that in addition to the international legal frameworks for transit, regional and bilateral agreements such as on coordination with neighbouring countries on data exchange and guarantees etc. need to be considered, as well national laws and regulations on customs formalities, control at borders, coordinated border management at national level etc.

Mr. Osawa also mentioned the main elements of regional/bilateral agreements, namely data exchange, One Stop Border Post (OSBP), customs seals, regional guarantees, fees and charges, highlighting the different aspects of transit. He stressed that bilateral and regional agreements/arrangements should consider provisions for effective information exchange, including information protection issues, limitations on the use of the information, provide for harmonization of information requirements in line with international standards and regional agreements. He also noted that many customs administrations use customs electronic seals, but highlighted the issue that since many customs seals are applicable only at national levels, they need to be replaced at the borders. Without regional or bilateral agreements or arrangements, facilitation measures could be another trade barrier and he urged countries to consider regional arrangements on electronic seals.

He also presented his recommendations to establish bilateral/regional legal framework. He suggested all countries should i) check existing regional or bilateral agreements to avoid duplication, ii) use international standards such as WCO Transit Guidelines when developing new transit agreements which can contrib-

ute to harmonization of different transit procedures, and iii) build capacity. He underscored the WCO Mercator Programme to support implementation of the TFA which focuses on tailor-made technical assistance and capacity building, harmonized implementation based on WCO's global standards, and effective coordination among all stakeholders. He further introduced WCO Tools (Implementation Guidance) for the implementation of the TFA, which are available at: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/wco-implementing-the-wto-atf/atf.aspx>.

He recalled WCO's expertise for capacity building and highlighted that the WCO had delivered around 210 technical assistance missions to more than 70 countries in the past 2 years to support the TFA implementation, and is ready to allocate WCO staff or national customs experts who are best suited to meet the needs of countries.

Interactive discussion

In the interactive discussion, participants emphasized the need for countries to adopt international trade and transport related conventions and several organizations expressed their support for multilateral transit system. It was stressed that UN conventions are open to all UN Member States and the solutions that they offer apply in all regions of the world. It was mentioned that the effectiveness of the conventions is actually an impediment to their implementation, as illegal payments would dry out. In terms of the cost, it was explained that there is no cost to ratify a convention, and that international organizations, including the UN ECE, IRU and WCO stand ready to offer assistance with training on how to use and implement the conventions. Recently signed MoU between IRU and Asian Institute for Transport Development on cooperation on areas of mutual interest was mentioned. It was reiterated that the TIR is open all modes of transport and that harmonized and standardized approach is needed. The significance of India planning to accede to the TIR conventions was noted.

Participants stressed that the various modes of transport need to be used, including rails and roads, in a way that can deliver more profitable result for customers. The work of the Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transportation (CCTT) in establishing different kinds of transport products and cargo flows to customers was highlighted.

The cost of transport and limited access to transport were highlighted as key challenges for the LLDCs, especially for the least developed landlocked countries. It was highlighted that conducting surveys is one of the ways to identify the bottlenecks for goods in transit, what are the costs and where the time is spent in transit.

The role of the private sector in reducing the costs and fees associated with transit was highlighted, as well as the need for cooperation with the private sector on customs. It was noted that it is important to focus not only on data exchange between the different border crossing agencies, but also what is the result of this exchange, other than just as a source for risk management.

Participants called for effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, as well early ratification of the Istanbul convention (Convention on Temporary Admission). It was noted that WCO is working with the ICC to promote the Istanbul Convention.

G. Session on Promoting Customs Cooperation

The World Customs Organization (WCO) -- Mr. Toshihiko Osawa, Technical Officer of Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, WCO, introduced the WCO Transit Handbook which provides valuable information on the Revised Kyoto Convention; relevant WCO tools and the best practices of WCO Members. The 8 approaches outlined in the Transit Handbook are effective information sharing, customs seals and other security measures, coordinated border management, performance measurement, risk management, border infrastructure, simplification of customs formalities and guarantee system. He noted that WCO is in the process of converting the transit handbook into transit guidelines. The first workshop took place in Cote d'Ivoire on possible contents in June 2016, followed by survey and production of draft guidelines during July-September 2016, followed by second and third workshops in Zambia in October 2016 and in Bolivia in January 2017. The WCO Technical Committees will further refine the guidelines by April 2017 and the launch is planned for July 2017 during the WCO Global Conference.

Mr. Osawa stressed that there were over 140 recommendations in the transit guidelines and highlighted several as follows:

- Governments are encouraged to take the necessary steps to develop or accede to regional or international guarantee systems, which are more efficient than a chain of national guarantee systems.
- When Customs administrations do not impose fees or charges for the administrative expenses on import or export, or in other Customs procedures, they should not impose such fees or charges on transit.
- Customs administrations are encouraged to develop regional electronic Customs seals to be used for transit operations in the region, as replacing the electronic Customs seal with another seal at the border could give rise to delays.
- Customs administrations may use a Customs escort or convoy only in cases where the loss of transit goods en route would create an imminent risk for the safety and security of the Customs territory; other security measures are not applicable because of the type of transit goods or transport unit; the transit operator requests a Customs escort or convoy.
- Governments should coordinate transit operation activities between different border control agencies, in particular through the national committee on trade facilitation.
- Governments should seek to establish a one stop border post (OSBP) for effective transit operations, using existing references such as the One Stop Border Post Sourcebook.
- When national legislation obliges transit operators to submit an electronic transit declaration in advance, the time limit and other requirements should follow the standards and technical specifications of the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards.
- Governments should ensure that all relevant information on transit operations is made publicly available, is free of charge and easily accessible to all transit operators, in line with the WCO Transparency and Predictability Guidelines and the WCO Arusha Declaration.
- Governments are encouraged to conduct a periodic Time Release Study on transit operations in cooperation with their partners along trade routes in order to identify bottlenecks for transit operations following the WCO Time Release Study Guide.

Viet Nam -- Mr. Nguyen Nhat Kha, Deputy Director of Customs Supervision and Control Department, General Department of Viet Nam Customs, first pointed out that the import and export of goods between countries had increased in frequency along with the development of the market economy. The transit of goods had not only created convenience but also reduced cost and improved effectiveness. He stressed that Viet Nam, with its geographic advantage of having a sea coast, can export its goods directly to the rest of the ASEAN region and beyond, as well as serve as an important transit country for Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, or Yunnan Province of China. Realizing that duty, he noted that Viet Nam had made enormous efforts in fostering the transit business and services through developing both infrastructure network as well as legal framework to smoothen these services at the national level through trade law and customs law and various decrees, as well as through signing of Transit Agreement with Laos, Cambodia and China.

He said that, in order to enhance the management and supervision capacity in customs, the Ministry of Finance launched in 2014 the electronic customs clearance systems which had facilitated businesses in goods declaration, helped reduce the time in customs clearance, as well as made customs management, monitoring and statistics more convenient, transparent and effective.

He said that there are now specific customs procedures for goods in transit where goods are declared electronically and declared on separate transport declaration, as opposed to previous requiring manual procedures and paper declarations. Transit goods are also currently subject to customs supervision from entry to exit checkpoints and physical checks are conducted only on suspicious cases.

Thus, he pointed out that, compared with the traditional method, declaring electronically create favourable conditions for businesses to declare and clear the quantity of imported goods while satisfying the management and statistical requirements of the customs agency. However, he said that the transition from manual management to digital management initially had several difficulties, including different regulations of different countries for transit and other goods; need for closer coordination since transit

goods are under supervision of customs during the transportation times in the country; and illegal tampering with customs seals.

He highlighted number of measures that the Ministry of Finance had implemented in order to resolve these difficulties, including promoting, disseminating information and providing training for customs officers, civil servants and businesses on the new system and how to comply with the regulations; synchronizing customs management policies to align with the new customs administration; organizing experience learning sessions for customs officers in developed countries; and promptly answering and solving problems arising for enterprises on policies, procedures and systems during implementation.

Mr. Nguyen Nhat Kha highlighted several solutions that Viet Nam is implementing and/or planning to undertake. Viet Nam will continue improving policy customs procedures on goods in transit to meet the requirements of management and supervision, upgrade and build additional functions for the declaration software to meet the management requirement for separate transport declaration and is also finding solutions to upgrade the electronic customs clearance system to meet the Customs Law of 2014. He also informed that the General Department of Viet Nam Customs had been studying the application of more modern methods such as using GPS seals to manage and monitor goods in transit instead of the current customs seals and implemented got pilot project in 2015 and 2016 to implement the e-seal, which would alert the customs if the seal were broken.

He also mentioned that Viet Nam will continue to enhance bilateral and international cooperation in the field of customs transit between Viet Nam and Laos, Cambodia and China in the context of signed bilateral agreements on transit and will continue actively participating in multilateral cooperation in the field of goods in transit in the ASEAN region by participating in the Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit.

He mentioned that in order to promote goods-in-transit services in the ASEAN region, Viet Nam and other Southeast Asian countries had signed the Framework Agreement on trade facilitation, including the Protocol 7 on goods in transit, according to which

goods in transit shall be placed under the ASEAN Custom Transit System (ACTS). He stressed that participation in this Agreement would create favourable legal basis for the formation of an effective transit system and was one of important measures for the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Serbia -- Mr. Veselin Milosevic, Acting Deputy DG of the Customs Administration of Serbia, shared his country's experience on promoting customs co-operation, particularly in regards to implementation of the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS). He stressed that before joining the EU, countries must accept the transit system of the EU, by joining the Common Transit Convention (CTC) and Single Administrative Document (SAD) Convention. Serbia is a transit country and before joining the common transit system of the EU in February 2016, all vehicles making transit from Turkey to Europe, coming to border of Serbia, had to stop and switch from using the common transit system to national transit procedure in Serbia. He noted that even Macedonia and Turkey were part of the system and harmonized with the EU countries, given their proximity and trading links with the EU. Only three neighbouring countries were not part of the CTC - Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia- but they were considering possibility of joining.

Next, he talked about the implementation of the Guarantee Management System (GMS) in Serbia, from the first changes of customs regulations in the part of guarantee for the transit of goods in 2011, to the use of Comprehensive Guarantee, parallel with the "old" system of guarantee in transit which began on 1 January 2012, and to the use of only Comprehensive Guarantee since 1 January 2013. He also pointed out that the use of Comprehensive Guarantee in the Republic of Serbia started before of the implementation of the NCTS and called on other countries to consider this possibility.

He then introduced the implementation of NCTS under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2011 which began in December 2012. The Inception phase was completed in January and February 2013, when the Customs Administration of Serbia (CAS) accepted the Functional Specifications. Then, the National Project Plan (NPP) was developed and formally adopted by the CAS in March 2013. He further recalled the importance of regular monthly reports

on the implementation of the NPP until the end of Project on 1 March 2015. The Internal Working Group and the Trade Contact Group (TCG) were established in April and May 2013, respectively.

Next, the pilot phase of the national implementation of NCTS system began in September 2014, parallel to the use of the OTS. The national implementation (use) of the NCTS system began, as an obligatory transit procedure in the Republic of Serbia, on 25th January 2015, while the use of OTS ended. Over the next year, monitoring and evaluation missions and testing with neighbouring countries took place and national law on the ratification of the CTC and SAD Conventions were adopted. The government of the Republic of Serbia lodged the instruments for access to the CTC and SAD Conventions on 7 December 2015 and the European Commission adopted a Note of accession of the Republic of Serbia to the CTC and the SAD Conventions on 21 December 2015. In February 2016, Serbia acceded to the CTC and SAD Conventions and began operational use of the common NCTS, a very important step for transit country like Serbia.

Mr. Milosevic highly recommended that countries adopt National Project Plan and establish such groups. He pointed out that the NPP was one of the most important documents in implementation phase, with the purpose to provide information to all Member States on the integration of National Transit Application (NTA) in the common transit system. The NPP is used for monitoring the implementation of the NCTS system in a country.

The Internal Working Group consisted of 36 experts from different areas of customs operations with specific obligations and responsibility. The responsibilities within the WG focused on coordination of activities, coordination of the Project to be in line with the NPP, IT matters, quality of Project, amendments to customs legal regulations, GMS, Risk Management System, Authorization Management System and other specific customs matters. He recalled that the members of TCG were the representatives of the most important traders in the country (transit, export, import, as well as banks and insurance companies. The Group would share news and necessary information about implementation of NCTS System. He also pointed out that Serbia established in HQ a Transit Department as a central transit desk respon-

sible amongst other things for legal issues; Help Desk responsible to support traders and customs officers for business and IT matters; system of Regional Coordination's Group responsible to share the information about the NCTS in the region.

He highlighted the types of transit procedures in the Republic of Serbia after 1 February 2016, including for the movement of goods between EU and EFTA countries or between EFTA countries, the movement of goods which has the status of goods from EU and the mixed consignments of goods. He noted that Serbia would continue with the use of national transit system, TIR carnet thru NCTS system, ATA carnet thru NCTS system and transit of goods by rail thru NCTS system.

He finally said that Serbia had seen benefits from the implementation of the NCTS, after first year of implementation, including increase in the total number of vehicles in transit by 9%, increase in the number of transit declarations by 13%, and increase in payments to the budget of the basis of transit in the amount of 5 million euros.

Kyrgyzstan -- Mr. Shamil Berdaliev, Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Service of the Kyrgyz Republic, talked about international freight transport and trade in Central Asia and the corridors within the framework of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) region. He pointed out that the CAREC Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy has been focused on the development of six transport corridors, three of which passed through Kyrgyzstan territory.

He recalled a 2008 7th Ministerial Meeting of CAREC which adopted the Action Plan for 2008-2017 with the objective of increasing intra-regional trade by 25% by 2012 and by 50% by 2017, through implementation of 62 planned projects totalling \$21.2 billion. He said that as a result of this regional plan, through modernization and rehabilitation of the international transport corridors, the traffic in Kyrgyzstan increased. Since August 2015, Kyrgyzstan became part of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) which opened up new prospects and benefits in terms of provision of alternative communications and international trade and commodity flows.

He said the Kyrgyzstan had identified several aspects of improving customs procedures in the following areas: harmonization of customs legislation with EAEU; bringing customs IT and software up to accordance with the customs legislation of the EAEU; modernization of border checkpoints in line with international standards. Mr. Berdaliev also mentioned that their automated customs information system was being modernized and all customs operations and procedures were now automated.

He explained that regarding the optimization of state control at the border, customs took over some functions like inspections, radiation monitoring, weight and document control, as well as vehicle registry through the principle of single window. It is established that the time of transit through Kyrgyzstan must not exceed one hour. Mr. Berdaliev stressed that the main mission of border customs was to verify reliability of information provided by carriers and control the flow of data. As of February 2016, submission of preliminary information on goods coming into Kyrgyzstan is mandatory. As part of these efforts, preliminary information is being shared with ports outside of Kyrgyzstan, risk management system was being implemented and Authorized Economic Operators systems were being used for simplification of international trade and transit.

He also highlighted that Kyrgyzstan acceded to major UN international transport related conventions. He noted that since Kyrgyzstan was a LLDC, the TIR system had a significant impact on the development of transit in the country and that Kyrgyzstan has the potential to become a transit bridge between Europe and Asia.

He mentioned that the results of reforms were seen through identification of violations of customs transit procedures such as in 2016 when customs seized drugs found in agricultural products transiting through Kyrgyzstan. He concluded by saying that recreating the Silk Road as a promising transit corridor was being considered by not only Euro-Asian countries, but also the whole world.

Interactive discussion

In the interactive discussion, Georgia's important transit function was highlighted, as well as the business friendly approach that Georgia promotes, under

which transit may be conducted in the territory of Georgia without international guarantee. The efforts of COMESA to introduce a system of electronic convoy, which once implemented would eliminate the need for physical convoys, were emphasized. The challenge of implementing such systems by all countries, which reduces their effectiveness, were raised as well as questions on how to encourage countries to effectively implement such systems at the national level. Lack of national coordination between different agencies responsible for border crossing, like agriculture, product safety and health issues, was cited as one of the challenges to effective implementation.

The representative of WCO explained that the WCO Transit Guidelines include different recommendations on the use of convoys in different scenarios. He noted that capacity building is key in order to effectively implement various trade facilitation measures and systems and the WCO will provide technical assistance based on the transit guidelines. He also noted that coordination at national level is key and that national committees on trade facilitation can play a coordinating role in this regard.

The issues of exchange of customs services and information between countries and simplified procedures for bilateral agreements were discussed.

H. Session on Experience Sharing on Promoting Customs Cooperation

Mr. Vitalie Vrabie, Director General of Customs Service of Moldova, Moldova Customs, outlined Moldova's Customs transit procedure. He pointed out that Moldova had strategic geographical position, making it attractive for conducting business between Eastern and Western markets. He highlighted that the simplification of customs procedures was of crucial importance. He spoke about Giurgiulesti International Free Port which had status of free economic zone and enabled port operations, short sea and river shipping, inland transportation, forwarding and featured a business park. The port ensures access to main trading destinations on the Black and Mediterranean Sea, to Danube river transportation links, and together with Moldova's trade growth have contributed to Moldova's important position in the region

and allowed Moldova access millions of potential consumers.

Mr. Vrabie highlighted regional trade integration efforts made by Moldova, including the EU - Moldova Association Agreement, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (2014); the Free Trade Agreement with Turkey (2016); being a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (2001); the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) 2006 and being a member of the Community of Independent States (CIS) (1994).

He stressed that the National Customs Transit Procedure meant that most documents could be filled out electronically through the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). However, he also recalled that the volume of transit operations in 2016 was 24% (of the total volume of cargo transmitting through Moldova's customs), which actually decreased slightly by 1.7 percentage points since previous year. This decline could be caused by regional instability (situation in Ukraine and Russia), the EU-Russia trade sanctions and the Russia-Turkey trade sanctions.

He also presented a brief data-driven presentation on the development of transit operations from the CIS (the Commonwealth of Independent States) and the EU via Moldova, highlighting that transit from the CIS region fell by more than transit operations from EU since 2014. He also emphasized that TIR operations during 2014-2016 fell dramatically while T1 Transit Declaration operations increased, with the TIR accounting for 53% of operations in 2016.

He then introduced two types of guarantees, namely cash or transfer, and Moldovan bank guarantee. According to national legislation of Moldova, it was not necessary to provide guarantees for rail, air, and conduit operations.

Moldova's future priorities, according to him, would focus on the EU Twinning Project; implementation of the NCTS based on the latest version of the ASYCUDA World application software developed by the UNCTAD, implementation of GPS tracking system and use of Authorized Consignor / Consignee.

Turkey -- Mr. Osman Nuri Beyhan, Deputy Director General for the EU and External Relations, Turkish Customs, spoke about the initiatives of Turkish customs aiming at simplified and harmonized customs and transit procedures. He pointed out that international trade was the engine for economic growth and poverty reduction and sustainable development. According to him, sustained international trade needed a well-established legal basis, well-organized infrastructures, as well as the implementation of simplified and harmonized customs and transit procedures.

He presented 2 examples from Turkey, the Modernization of Border Crossing Points (BCPs) with Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) System, and E-TIR Projects with Iran and Georgia. He explained that the BOT Model for modernization of border crossing points in Turkey was composed of three parts: Build - the border gate facility is rebuilt (Financed by private party) based on a Contract between government and a private party, Operate - the operation of commercial facilities and operational activities is done by private party for a certain period of time subject to the contract, and Transfer - the facilities are transferred to the public sector free of charge after the period stipulated in the contract.

The replacement of the existing ineffective and insufficient infrastructures by new and modern ones would enable a suitable architecture, making customs and transit formalities easier; facilitate responding to technological developments, and; provide a modern environment for the users (traders, transporters, passengers, etc.), without spending from the public budget. He gave some examples of the Modernization of BCPs: the Kapikule BCP (Turkey- Bulgaria), the İpsala BCP (Turkey-Greece), and the Habur BCP (Turkey-Iraq) and noted that projects for 8 additional border gates and 1 customs clearance unit were in work.

With regards to the e-TIR projects, he pointed out that Turkey was a transit country due to its geographical location and therefore one of the biggest beneficiary countries of the transit systems. He mentioned that there were 2 main transit systems in use in Turkey – the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) for transport to the European Union and the EFTA, as well as the TIR for the rest of transport. He pointed out that almost one fifth of the total TIR carnets issued by the IRU were used by Turkish transporters.

He also commented on difference between the TIR and the Common Transit System (CTS), with the main differences being in the amount of the guarantees (TIR system has fixed amount of guarantee of 60,000 Euro in Turkey and 100,000 Euro by 1 July 2016 while CTS has comprehensive guarantee of 100% of potential debt, or reduced to 50% or 30% or guarantee waiver); restrictions on loading (TIR has limitations on loading and unloading while CTS has unlimited loading and unloading places) and computerization (TIR is paper-based for now while CTS is computerized).

Mr. Beyhan then noted that Turkey has shared its experience on the TIR system with other countries and is also working on e-TIR pilot projects with Iran (in collaboration with UN ECE and IRU) and Georgia (in collaboration with UN ECE), focusing on data exchange. The first phase of the Turkey-Iran project has now been successfully completed focusing on C2B2C, while the Turkey and Georgia project is based on C2C exchange. He expected that the e-TIR system could be applied to all TIR Contracting Parties, enhancing Trade Facilitation, but also efficient controls.

He concluded that the results of the implementation of e-TIR included simplified procedures, efficient and secure transport, well-functioning customs transactions, minimum interference and less awaiting times at borders, no extra deposit for duties and taxes, lower transport costs, etc. All these help facilitate the liberalization and facilitation of international trade, leading to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

Azerbaijan -- Mr. Shahin Baghirov, Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee, Azerbaijan Customs, presented approaches for an effective transit system and the relevant experience of Azerbaijan, in particular on effective information sharing, guarantee system, simplification of customs formalities, risk management, customs seals and other security measures, border infrastructure, coordinated border management, and performance measurement.

Regarding effective information sharing, he highlighted Azerbaijan's bilateral information sharing on transit declarations with Georgia, Iran and Russian Federation; information sharing with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan which was in the implementation phase; and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed

with GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova).

He explained that guarantee system is important to promote increasing reliability of the collection of customs revenues; ensure unimpeded transit; and improve the efficiency of customs control. He emphasized that the generic amount of guarantee coverage per TIR Carnet increased to 100,000 euros for Azerbaijan since 2016. Regarding the simplification of customs formalities, Mr. Baghirov noted that the submission of pre-arrival notification for goods entering into Azerbaijan enabled more effective risk analysis and facilitation of border crossing.

Regarding risk management, he highlighted that customs risk management system in Azerbaijan, which meets international standards, was considered to be one of the main components for the effective border management; and that it was the main factor for the effective functioning of the 'Green corridor', ensuring more rapid and transparent implementation of the customs clearance of goods and means of transport.

Regarding customs seals and other security measures, he explained that Azerbaijan provisions of vehicles by means of customs security such as Global Positioning System tools (GPS) was used and movements of vehicles could be tracked by the monitoring centre located in the State Customs Committee (SCC). He stressed that Azerbaijan's objectives on border infrastructure were to develop closer cooperation and facilitate and simplify customs procedures.

On coordinated border management, he highlighted the benefits of using single window, which for the governments included more effective and efficient deployment of resources; correct revenue yield; improved trader compliance; enhanced security; and increased integrity and transparency. For the private sector, benefits included lower costs through reducing delays and informal payments; faster clearance and release; predictable application and explanation of rules available; more effective and efficient deployment of resources; increased transparency; as well as to less steps in processing. He noted that time required for border crossing have reduced by 70%.

Regarding performance measurement, he noted the WCO Time Release Study as a unique tool and meth-

od designed for the measurement of actual performance of Customs activities as they were directly related to trade facilitation at border.

Lao PDR -- Mr. Vongkhamhang Vongthachack, Lao Customs Department, MoF, presented on the topic of Lao's experience on the Customs Transit System. Regarding the legal framework for transit at the international level, he recalled that, under the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Cooperation, Lao PDR had signed the agreement for the Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Goods and People on 26 November 1999, which was revised on 29 November 2001, 03 November 2002 and 29 September 2003.

He further explained that at the regional level, under ASEAN Cooperation, Lao PDR signed the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Goods in Transit (AFAFGIT), dated 16 Dec 1998. He explained that the Annexes of Protocol under responsibility of Lao Customs Department included Protocol 7 on Customs Transit System which was signed on 24 February 2015 and Protocol 2 on Designation of Frontier Posts which was expected to be signed on 3-7 April 2017.

Under bilateral cooperation, he highlighted MoU on implementation of Common Control Area between Lao and Vietnam Customs signed on 27 October 2014; MoU on Common Control Area between Lao and Thai Customs which is in the process of preparation of signing and Tripartite agreement on Facilitation of cross border Transport of goods and people signed amongst Laos -Thailand-Vietnam.

As for relative internal legislation, he pointed out that there had been several provisions enforced in domestic entities. These include Customs Law and other regulations on international transit and procedures by Customs Department of Ministry of Finance; Ministerial Decision on control of restricted goods for transit movement by Import-Export Department, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Transport Law and other regulations by Transport Department, Ministry of Public Works and Transport.

He highlighted that there are various governmental agencies involved in the institutional arrangements for transit, including the Ministry of Transport which issues permits for transit operators, Ministry of Fi-

nance which provides for guarantee agreements between Lao Customs Department and transit operators, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Import-Export Department) which issues permits on Transit Movement of Restricted goods.

Regarding Transit Operation, the following formalities were being observed: single-window Inspection, Single-Stop customs inspection, Advance Exchange of cargo clearance information, priority for border crossing clearance, and reduction of physical inspections.

He stressed that to conduct transit, permits for transit operation from concerned agency, original documents from departing customs checkpoints, invoice and packing lists, sale contracts, as well as guarantee contracts between Customs Department and transit operator were required.

He cited the main requirements for a transit operator as follows: More than half of the company's capital must be owned by Lao Citizen; The enterprise must be directed by the majority of national citizens of Laos; Must not have convicted serious breaches of relevant laws and regulation of Laos; Must not have been sanctioned to perform a profession of road carrier due to breach of applicable laws or regulation; Must not have been declared bankrupt unless financial solvency has been restored according to laws and regulations of Laos; Must have been verified for sound professional competence in related fields such as legal matters relevant to road transport business, transport operation management, technical matters related to transport operation, road safety; Must have been assessed for financial solvency; and Must obtain appropriate insurance coverage for its contractual liability.

Mr. Vongthachack mentioned that there are various designated routes and border crossings for transit operations. For example, under GMS cross-border Transport Facilitation Agreement a Designated Route was the National Highway No.9; with several border crossings along the North-South Corridor, East-West Corridor and other corridors. Similarly, under ASEAN, Highways No. 3, 12, 11, 15, 16 were designated.

As for the facilities for transit operations, he highlighted areas for unloading, transshipment, inspection of

the cargo, warehouses, storage room including refrigerated space, container depot storing cargo pending the disclosure of results of sanitary or veterinary inspection, plant quarantine and disinfection facilities, staging points for unloading, accommodating or isolating consignment of live animals, as well as X-ray machines for goods and container inspection, vehicle weighing stations, parking lots, bank offices, travel information centres, and communication centres.

Furthermore, under GMS Lao needs to establish facilities for single-window inspection and single-stop customs inspection mechanisms and sign MOU on Implementation of Common Control Area between Dansavan -- Lao Bao Border Checkpoints and Mouk-dahan -- Friendship Bridge 2 Checkpoints. Under ASEAN, the ASEAN Customs Transit System is to be developed and facilities are to be improved or developed.

In concluding, he pointed out that Lao had limited funding and capacity for the development of land routes, development of capacity and necessary skills and knowledge for human resource, establishment of cross-border infrastructure, expansion of transport modes, improvement of transport services and network, simplification and harmonization of border-crossing formalities, and promotion of closed collaboration on information sharing at bilateral, regional, and international levels.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) -- Mr. Poul Hansen, Trade Facilitation Section of UNCTAD, stressed that transit was complicated in that it did not only included aspects related goods and services, in relation to conformity with standards, regulations and practices but also traffic regulations and operations, vehicle standards and regulation, and design, construction, maintenance of infrastructures in the country of origin as well as in the country of destination.

He emphasized that transit is about trade and transport facilitation, involving many stakeholders, not only customs and therefore requires coordinated border management approach at both sides of the border. Mr. Hansen underscored that infrastructure and facilitation must go hand in hand.

He continued by introducing the TFA Article 11 – Freedom of transit, listing the disciplines to be applied to

goods in transit as following: Simplified formalities, documentation, and controls; No restrictions affecting traffic in transit and transit discipline application; No discrimination vs. import traffic or between Members States cargos; Controls limited to the beginning and conclusion of the transit operations; Fees limited to transportation and administration services costs; No quality controls for goods in transit; and Regulations of transit guarantees and of customs convoy.

He mentioned that Members under the TFA there were various levels of obligations for the countries depending on the wording ('shall' means countries are obliged to implement as per description, 'encouraged to' which expects a best endeavour measure, 'shall endeavour to' means that the implementation would not be obligatory, but making efforts to implement the measure would be mandatory. He noted that Article 11 is often marked by countries as category C, meaning they require technical assistance to implement it.

He reminded participants that the TFA was not only comprised of the Article 11, but it also had other transit-related articles overseeing aspects of trade facilitation, including: Article 1.1. Publication, Article 1.2. Publication on the Internet, Article 2.1. Opportunity to comment, Article 6.3. Penalties, Article 7.7. Authorized Operators, Article 8. Border Agency Cooperation, Article 10. Formalities, incl. International standards, and Article 23.2 National Trade Facilitation Committee. He highlighted the last one as particularly important and noted that UNCTAD provides training for the establishment and functioning of national trade facilitation committees.

He further stressed the complementarity between bilateral, regional and multilateral transport or transit transport agreements. He pointed out that bilateral agreements could be effective to regulate transit conditions, but they could also be restrictive. Besides, regional agreements, such as the ASEAN and Guarantee Management System (GMS) need to be implemented correctly and should be built on international multilateral agreements, such as the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), the TIR Convention and the Harmonization Convention.

He mentioned that international legal instruments played a big role in transit and trade facilitation, as

they are open to all member states, presented tested standards and that they could be seen as a basis for regional or bilateral cooperation. He noted that international organizations can assist with the ratification and implementation of these instruments, through capacity building and other support.

Mr. Hansen focused on regional corridor arrangements, such as that of the Northern Corridor, as good examples of regional approach since they offered focused approach, limited number of stakeholders, as well as specific interest of all stakeholders, and they could be potentially easier to negotiate. He highlighted several issues for landlocked countries. He first appealed for clear rules and regulations for transit operations to improve the mechanism of transport, customs, transit, and border procedures.

Secondly, he stressed that LLDCs' attention should be moved from the "LLDC victim" status to international partnership focus. In that sense, LLDCs should focus on creating economies of scale for their transit partners and seeking land-linking opportunities based on partnerships. Thirdly, he talked about the need for LLDCs to be aware of sensitivity to certain issues in transit countries, such as at public level, for example, contraband as well as infrastructure costs, and competition at the private level.

He also underscored several issues for transit countries, including securing public interests by compliance with public revenue protection and public health/security, as well as protecting infrastructure. Secondly, transit countries should look to economies of scale in port services, logistics services and infrastructure costs in order to reduce the costs of trade. Thirdly, transit traffic could generate surges of services and economic activities in transit countries – these could include public services, repairs & workshops, gas stations, rest and parking places, small trade along transit corridors like restaurants, as well as warehouses.

Finally, he proposed several issues for consideration. These included national implementation of the TFA, consideration of multilateral agreements such as the TIR Convention in the context of better regional cooperation, better connectivity can foster shared benefits, attention to cross-border connectivity which relies on relevant infrastructure development and

data sharing mechanisms, and how trade facilitation would support the achievement of the SDGs.

I. Session on Enhancing Partnerships and the Means of Implementation

H.E. Mr. Katsuro Nagai, Minister of the Embassy of Japan to Vietnam, pointed out that more than two years had passed since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). He indicated that Japan had placed great significance on sustainability and taken a people-centred approach in the development of LLDCs, including in the Euro-Asia region. He pointed out that sustainable and people-centred development would need to be supported by quality financing, quality investment, and quality institutions, so that resources could be directed to the places where they were needed most and could be utilized most effectively. He further indicated that at the same time, it would also be necessary to make use of all potential sources of funding, both domestic and international.

He recalled that, in the international arena, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had represented a significant new state of affairs since the adoption of the VPoA and its follow-up meeting in Zambia and he pointed out that it would be important, therefore, to ensure consistency between the 2030 Agenda and the VPoA.

Mr. Nagai pointed out that, as a country which continually stressed the need to uphold human security, Japan placed great importance on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both domestically and internationally, and it had been making great efforts to support the implementation of relevant strategies and programmes of action, including the VPoA for Landlocked Developing Countries. In this connection, Japan set up the SDGs Promotion Headquarters headed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He further recalled that Japan formulated the guidelines for Japan's implementation of the SDGs last December, based on Japan's already excellent track record in sustainable economic and social development, to serve as a model for the international community. He underscored that Japan aimed to become a role model for the world in the implementation of mea-

asures to achieve the SDGs and would make efforts both in Japan and in cooperation with other countries to achieve sustainable societies worldwide such that no one would be left behind. Regarding the development of LLDCs, he suggested that it would be essential to build unrestricted access to global markets. This, according to him, would be an obvious lesson to be drawn from the experiences of the Euro-Asian region, which had managed to achieve economic growth through trade for decades.

He reaffirmed that Japan had been working closely with LLDCs in the areas of its greatest expertise, such as infrastructure development and trade facilitation, which were specified in the Almaty Programme of Action and prioritized in the Vienna Programme of Action. With regard to trade facilitation, he pointed out that Japan set a high priority on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in developing countries and had been providing support for international harmonization and simplification of customs procedures in cooperation with the relevant organizations such as the WCO. For example, Japan had been actively supporting projects on such measures as electronic customs procedures in the ASEAN, implementation of Single Window, as well as the establishment and operation of the One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) in Africa.

He indicated that Japan had been utilizing ODA and other initiatives as catalysts to attract additional private investment, including investment from Japan, while respecting the ownership of LLDCs. He gave a recent example of Japan's efforts on infrastructural development in the Euro-Asia region, in particular, the installation of airport control and protection systems in eight major airports, including the Tribhuvan International Airport, in Nepal. He noted that the objective of this project was to provide aviation safety facilities and other equipment to these airports, thereby improving guidance and landing safety for aircrafts at their destination airports.

He informed that Japan would continue to engage in the improvement of the overall economic environment for development, in both its tangible and intangible dimensions, by supporting the formation of regional economic areas in cooperation with LLDCs, transit countries, and development partners. He added that Japan would also continue to support the

progress of the LLDCs towards achieving greater independence and prosperity, while at the same time respecting their ownership and autonomy.

H.E. Mr. Vu Quang Minh, Assistant Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, pointed out that the Vienna Program of Action underscored the need to enhance and expand partnerships among LLDCs, neighbouring transit countries, development partners and other stakeholders, for the effective implementation of the VPoA, while simultaneously highlighting that development and progress should be the primary responsibility of each country. He said that the Resolution A/RES/71/239 (Follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries), which was recently adopted by the UN General Assembly emphasized that partnerships would need to be enhanced at all levels: at the national, regional and global level, and in both bilateral and multilateral dimensions.

He indicated that, first of all, Viet Nam believed that the main pillar of these partnerships was the traditional North - South partnership. With their clear advantages and advances in technology, capital, finance and capacity. He further pointed out that developed countries had lent their positive support to LLDCs throughout the years in the areas of poverty alleviation, trade facilitation, and capacity enhancement – especially productive capacity. He highlighted that in the years to come, in order to support LLDCs to eradicate poverty, stimulate growth, and attain the Sustainable Development Goals, it would be crucial that developed countries fulfil their ODA commitments.

H.E. Mr. Vu Quang Minh also pointed out that in reality, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contained specific targets dedicated to support LLDCs in infrastructure development, access to modern energy, in prioritization of ODA and FDI. He also highlighted that the Vienna Program of Action also outlined key areas of support to LLDCs in trade facilitation, transport and telecommunications infrastructure development, regional integration and so on. He further indicated that the realization of these commitments by developed countries towards LLDCs would be indispensable in helping LLDCs overcome geographical challenges to transform their economies and get on the path of sustainable development.

He recalled that the South – South partnership, which complemented North – South partnership, also played a very important role in the implementation of the Vienna Program of Action. He pointed out that most transit countries are themselves developing countries, and the nature of co-operation among these countries was primarily South - South cooperation. He pointed out that this form of partnership would need to be further expanded based on their specific advantages, such as the similarity in the level of development, a common knowledge and understanding of one another's culture, geography, customs and administrative procedures due to geographical proximity. He however acknowledged that South – South Co-operation had its own shortcomings, because transit countries themselves had been developing countries with limitations in resources and capacity and that these transit countries also faced huge challenges in finance, technology and were restrained by their level of development. As such, support, especially financial support from developed countries to South-South Cooperation, would be essential.

He highlighted that in order to successfully implement the Vienna Program of Action, relying on government-to-government partnership would not be sufficient and that it would require the participation and coordination of other stakeholders, such as global and regional organizations and financial institutions, public-private partnerships, and even of all citizens. He indicated that he was happy that the meeting had attracted a lot of high level interest from UN organizations, the World Bank, the ADB, the AIIB, the WCO, the ITU and other important organizations. He further noted that in addition to financial assistance, these institutions and organizations had provided important technical and capacity building support.

He reaffirmed that Viet Nam acknowledged the concerns and remained sensitive to the specific geographical disadvantages of LLDCs and he further indicated that Viet Nam believed that adequate attention should be given to the interests and demand of this group of countries. He informed the meeting that Viet Nam, the ASEAN in general, and countries in the Mekong sub-region in particular, had made efforts to enhance connectivity and comprehensive co-operation to narrow the development gap in the region. He indicated that this included developing transport linkages within the Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity and

the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and Narrowing the Development Gap. He further informed the meeting that Viet Nam had also strengthened co-operation in the Mekong sub-region among member countries and development partners, and Viet Nam had promoted the development and operation of economic corridors.

He concluded by pointing out that Viet Nam had been determined to fulfil their commitments as a transit country and would continue to make their contributions to enhance and expand partnerships, especially with LLDCs, in order to join efforts in strengthening international cooperation in transit, trade facilitation, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for regional and global stability and sustainable development.

Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships, World Bank pointed out that there is a general agreement on the need to transform the LLDCs from being landlocked to being landlinked. He noted that however there is still a challenge to achieve the transformation. He indicated that design and technical approach was important for successful implementation of the projects in the LLDCs. He further indicated that some of the LLDCs had made notable progress in infrastructure development giving an example of Mali. Regarding connectivity he indicated that it should not only be about facilitating trade but should also be about saving lives. He highlighted that achieving connectivity was one of the priorities of the Bank. He informed that the Bank was implementing 47 projects on ICT.

He pointed out that the following aspects were necessary for successful infrastructure development: MDBs need to be more united; Need to consolidate and scale up to promote greater knowledge transfer, project preparation, and implementation support; Need to improve data and information on infrastructure; Promote compatible efficient approaches to key constraints to reduce transaction costs of building and implementing infrastructure projects; Need to strengthening project preparation including preparing bankable infrastructure projects; and MDBs financing should not crowd out the private sector. On financing infrastructure development he pointed out that there is need to enhance the involvement

of the private sector and he warned that the MDBs should not crowd out the private sector. He highlighted that there are opportunities to support viability gap funding arrangements to help PPP projects meet bankability and affordability criteria. He also pointed out that there is need to promote cooperation between the new and the existing MDB.

In conclusion he indicated that the success of projects implementation is determined by the level of capacity at national level as well as coordination and as such it is necessary to build the necessary capacity at national level.

Mr. Virgil Nae, Head of European Investment Bank Representation to China and Mongolia informed the meeting that the European Investment Bank was the largest public bank whose members were the countries of the EU. He highlighted that the Bank support sustainable development. He pointed out that to achieve the SDGs the involvement of the private sector was very important. He highlighted that it was important that governments create enabling environment to facilitate the involvement of the private sector by putting in place the right policies both at national and international level to support.

He also highlighted climate change was one of the biggest environmental, social and economic threats and as such climate action was important for development policy. He pointed out that the European Investment Bank have made climate change mitigation and adaptation a top policy priority and that it supports low-carbon and climate-resilient growth within and outside the Union.

He informed the meeting that in 2015 the European Investment Bank Group recorded lending of about EUR 84 billion to support investment in infrastructure and improve access to finance across Europe and around the world. He recognized that public resources are scarce and therefore need to be used wisely. He highlighted that other sources of financing are important to catalyze private sector funding. He advised that in involving the private sector, it is important to ensure affordability and that the environment standards are also met. He also indicated that blending could be an important vehicle for leveraging additional resources.

He concluded by emphasizing the need for the multi-lateral development banks to work together. He highlighted the need for collective and effective collaboration including knowledge sharing and follow-up.

Mr. Eric Sidgwick, Country Director of Vietnam Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank indicated that the implementation of The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was critical for the Asia Pacific Region in view of the fact that half of the world poor are found in the region. He further indicated that the region was also prone to climate change. He pointed out that the Asia Development Bank was actively involved in promoting good practices on trade facilitation in partnership with the WCO as well as ESCAP. He also pointed out that in 2015 the Bank worked with OECD and the World Trade Organization to support of the Aid for Trade initiative and also participated in the Aid for Trade Global Review.

Mr. Sidgwick further informed that ADB was preparing a new strategy which will outline ADB's engagement with developing member countries until 2030 and also describe how ADB aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change, and also identify institutional and organizational reforms necessary to sharpen ADB's efficiency and effectiveness. He pointed out that the ADB was supporting the regional initiatives including the Greater Mekong Sub-regional Projects.

On financing, he indicated that the region's infrastructure needs are estimated at about USD26 trillion and this include infrastructure for climate change and corridors development. On resource mobilization he indicated that there is need to improve resource mobilization. He also emphasized the need to promote PPP. He however acknowledged the challenges of PPP project especially regional projects. He encouraged that these need to be considered in the future.

Interactive discussion

In the discussion, a representative from ITU emphasized the importance of ICT to achieve SDGs. She indicated that ITU provides assistance to LLDCs, LDCs and the SIDS to develop their ICT regulatory framework. She further called for partners to work with them in assisting the vulnerable countries to develop their ICT Sector.

A representative of ICC emphasized the importance of involving the private sector for the successful implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. She further indicated that Article 10.1 of the TFA could only be successfully implemented with the involvement of the ICC and the WCO. She expressed that ICC could be a good partner in the implementation of the WTO TFA.

A representative of AITD pointed out the need build energy infrastructure across borders to allow for shared energy across borders. He indicated that some parts of Asia have an oversupply of energy whilst the others had deficiency and as such it is important to share energy across borders.

J. Way forward and closing session

In this session, **Ambassador Juan Esteban Aguirre Martinez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations in Geneva, and LLDC Group Coordinator on Trade and Development**, presented for consideration for adoption the key Recommendations of the meeting. The participants adopted the Recommendations.

In his closing remarks, **Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States**, thanked the participants for the successful conclusion of the High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He commended them for sharing experiences and best practices and practical solutions on enhancing cooperation on transit, infrastructure development, and trade facilitation that are important for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He commended participants for the initiatives on improving transit, trade facilitation and implementation of the SDGs that were highlighted in the meeting.

He highlighted the importance of working together at all levels by combining the national leadership and capacity building, the regional and sub-regional cooperation as well as the global partnerships. Working

together at all levels, the LLDCs and transit countries will be able to improve cooperation on transit, trade facilitation and achieve the SDGs. He underscored the importance of development partners, multi-lateral development banks, and South-South cooperation in supporting both the hard and soft infrastructure to improve transit and promote trade. He also underscored the important role of the private sector. He stressed that since the TFA had entered into force, there is need to increase the momentum behind efforts to implement it fully and effectively. He thanked the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, for hosting the Meeting and for IRU and WCO for partnering in the organization of the meeting.

H.E. Mr. Vu Quang Minh, Assistant Minister, Director-General, Economic Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the S.R. of Viet Nam,

indicated that the meeting had two and a half days of thoughtful and intensive discussions on ways and means to support landlocked and transit countries in increasing their participation and benefiting more from the international trade. The discussion had proved that there was much room for further cooperation among landlocked countries, transit countries, development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector. Cooperation could be expanded in various areas, such as transit infrastructure development, trade, custom and cross-border clearance, resource mobilization. All these efforts would contribute greatly to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

He expressed his gratitude to all participants for attending the meeting and closed the meeting.

ANNEX: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Member States

Afghanistan

- H. E Humayoon Rasaw; Minister of Commerce and Industries

Albania

- Mr. Saimir SINANI; Director of Customs Procedures, Directorate General of Customs
- Elvana Bicollji; Specialist, Directorate of Foreign Affairs and Public Relations, Directorate General of Customs

Armenia

- Mr. Robert Harutyunyan; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Seyran HAKOBYAN; Deputy Head of the International Cooperation Department, State Revenue Committee of the Government

Australia

- Ms. Nguyen Thuy Linh; Huong Senior Economic Analyst, Economic and Development Cooperation Section, Australian Embassy

Austria

- Ms. Maria Helene Fuchs; Deputy Head of Mission to Vietnam

Azerbaijan

- H. E. Mr. Anar Imanov; Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Vietnam
- Mr. Elchin Ahmadov; Head of the Office of the Coordinating Council on Transit Freight
- Mr. Shahin BAGHIROV; Deputy Chairman, State Customs Committee
- Mr. Tamerlan Khalilov, Counsellor of the Embassy of Azerbaijan
- Mr. Eltay Aslanov; Consul of the Embassy of Azerbaijan

Belarus

- Ms. Olga GLOVINSKAYA; Chief Inspector of the Division of Movement Organization, State Customs Committee

Bosnia Herzegovina

- Mr. Ognjen ALAGIC; Head of Customs Procedures Unit, Indirect Taxation Authority

Cambodia

- Mr. Yuvaroath TAN; Deputy Director-General of International Trade, Ministry of Commerce
- Mr. Socheat ROEUN; Deputy Head of Phnom Penh Customs and Excise Branch, General Department of Customs and Excise
- Mr. Phadenvordeth MOENG; Deputy Director of WTO Notifications and Legal Compliance Department, General Department of International Trade, Ministry of Commerce

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- Suojin HU; Counsellor, The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office, Embassy of the P. R. China in Viet Nam
- Runa Zheng; Attache, The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office, Embassy of the P. R. China in Viet Nam
- Mrs. Wanwen PAN; Principal Staff Member, China Customs

France

- Mr. Rémi LAMBERT; Embassy of France deputy head of missions
- Ms. Justine BONIFACE; French Embassy – Political section

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- Mr. Samson URIDIA; Head of the Department of International Relations, Georgia Revenue Service

Germany

- Ms. Franziska Lang; Attachée, Commercial and Economic Affairs, Development Cooperation, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Hanoi

India

- Mr. Shri N. Ramakrishnan; Deputy Secretary,

Ministry of Commerce & Industry

- Mr. Vinayak Chandra GUPTA; Commissioner, Central Board of Excise and Customs, Ministry of Finance

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- Ms. Cecilia Piccioni; Italian Ambassador to Viet Nam, Embassy of Italy Hanoi, Vietnam

Japan

- Mr. Katsuro Nagai; Minister, Embassy of Japan in Vietnam
- Mr. Kenji Inoue; Second Secretary, Embassy of Japan in Vietnam
- Mr. Akihiko Nakano; Researcher, Embassy of Japan in Viet nam

Kazakhstan

- Mr. Beketzhan Zhumakhanov; Ambassador to Vietnam, Ruslan Bultrikov
- Mrs. Marina DAVIDOVSKAYA; Chief Expert, International Cooperation, State Revenue Committee, Ministry of Finance

Kenya

- Ms. Mumbi-Michelle Kimani; Special Assistant to Ambassador Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations

Kuwait

- Eng. Mamdouh Alanzi; Chief Engineer, Public Authority for Roads and Transportation

Kyrgyzstan

- Mr. Shamil BERDALIEV; Deputy Chairman, State Customs Service

Lao, People's Dem. Rep

- H.E. Dr. Kikeo Chanhthaboury; Deputy Minister, Ministry of Planning and Investment of Lao PDR
- Mr. Sirisamphanh VORACHITH; Director General of Planning and Cooperation Department, Ministry of Industry and Commerce;
- Mr. Vongkhamheng VONGTHACHACK; Deputy Director General, Lao Customs Department

Maldives

- Mr. Mahmood RIYAZ; Deputy Chief Superintendent, Maldives Customs Service

Moldova

- Mr. Vitalie VRABIE; Director General, Customs Service
- Mr. Dimitru VOLOVEI; Head of Customs Cooperation Division, Customs Service

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- Mr. Snezana VUCKOVIC; Assistant to the Director, Customs Administration

Myanmar

- Mr. Minn Minn; Ministry of Commerce

Nepal

- Hon. Romi Gauchan Thakali; Minister of Commerce
- Mr. Tirtha Raj WAGLE; Under Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Tarka Raj BHATTA; Under Secretary, Ministry of Commerce
- Mr. Dibya Raj POKHREL; Chief Customs Officer, Department of Customs, Tatopani Customs Office

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- Mr Rick Ligthart; Customs Attache, Customs Administration of Netherlands Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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- H.E. Mr. Juan Esteban Aguirre Martinez; Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign
- Mr. Marcial Espinola; Permanent Mission of Paraguay to the United Nations Office at Geneva

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- Mr. Abdullah Saeed AlAsiri; Ministry of Commerce and Investment, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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- Ms. Nguyen Thi Thu; Interpreter – Hanoi Mission

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- Mr. Veselin MILOSEVIC; Acting Deputy Director General, Customs Administration

Thailand

- Mr. Apinya PUNYACHEVA; Chief of Customs Procedures Sub-Division, Customs Department
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- Mr. Abrorov Shukuhiddin; Head of Department of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan

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- Mr. Soane Patita VAHE; Head of Tonga Customs Administration, Tonga Customs Administration

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- Mr. Shokhrukh Gulomov; Specialist of 1st Category of MFA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan

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- Đặng Sỹ Mạnh; Phó Cục trưởng, Cục Đường sắt Việt Nam
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- Nguyễn Đức Nam; Chuyên viên, Bộ Kế hoạch & Đầu tư

Zimbabwe

- Mrs. Constance Zhanje; Director of Research and Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Commerce

Organizations

ADB – Asian Development Bank

- Mr. Bambang Susantono; Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development
- Mr. Eric Sidgwick, Country Director of Vietnam Resident Mission

AIIB - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

- Mr. Jin Liqun; President; Tian Chen, 123. Mr. Chen Huan; Chief Officer
- Mr. Zhou Yong; Senior Advisor to the President

AITD - Asian Institute of Transport Development

- M. K.L. Thapar; Founder and Chairman; Mr. Lalit Malhotra

APIM - Asia Pacific Institute of Mongolia

- Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

- Mr. Ho Quang Trung; Director of Market Integration Directorate, ASEAN Economic Community Department; Le Quang Lan

BSEC - Black Sea Economic Cooperation

- Amb. Michael B. Christides; Secretary General, Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) of the Organization

CCTT - Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transportation

- Mr. Gennady Bessonov; Secretary General; Ms. Irina Spiridonova

COMESA - Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

- Dr. Kipyego Chelugot; Ambassador of Zambia;
- Mr. Baptiste Mutabazi; Director Infrastructure and Logistics
- Mr. Tasara Muzorori; Senior Trade Officer

EIA – European Investment Bank

- Mr. Virgil Nae, Head of European Investment Bank Representation to China and Mongolia

FAO - Food & Agricultural Organization

- Mr. JongHa Bae; FAO Representative in Vietnam

GIZ - Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

- Dr. Michael Krakowski; Manager for Macroeconomic Reform/Green Growth Programme

ICC – International Chamber of Commerce

- Mrs. Lee Ju Song; Executive Director, ICC Asia

IRU - International Road Transport Union

- Mr. Umberto de Pretto; Secretary General
- Mr. Jens Hügel; Head - Sustainable Development

ITU - International Telecommunication Union

- Ms. Aurora Rubio, Head, ITU Area Office for South East Asia

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

- Ms. Nguyen Thi Van Anh; JICA Vietnam Office
- Ms. Hoang Thi Tuat; JICA Vietnam Office
- Ms. Tran Mai Anh; JICA Vietnam Office

TMS - Transimex Corporation

- LE DUY HIEP; General Director, Transimex Corporation Viet Nam

TRACECA - Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

- Mr. Mircea Ciopraga; Secretary General, Intergovernmental Commission; Mr. Mircea Ciopraga

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

- Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi; Secretary-General; Ms. Severine Excoffier
- Mr. Poul Hansen, Division on Technology and Logistics

UN DESA - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

- Mr. Hongbu Wu; Under-Secretary General; Ms. Kay Govia

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

- Mr. Thangavel Palanivel; Chief Economist for Asia and the Pacific Region

UN ECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

- Mr. André Sceia; TIR secretariat, Transport Division

UN ECOSOC – United Nations Economic and Social Council

- H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava; President

UNEP - United Nations Environmental Programme

- Mr. Zhang Shigang; Country Coordinator in China; Zhang Shigang

UN ESCAP - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

- Ms. Shamshad Akhtar; Executive Secretary
- Mr. Hongjoo Hahm; Deputy Executive Secretary

UN GA – United Nations General Assembly

- H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau; Special Envoy of the UN President of the General Assembly on SDGs implementation and Climate Change

UN OHRLS

- Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya; Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS
- Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox; Director
- Ms. Gladys Mutangadura; Senior Programme Officer
- Ms. Nnana Mmanyabela Tshekega; Economic Affairs Officer
- Ms. Dagmar Hertova; Programme Officer
- Ms. Malwina A. Buldys; Public Information Officer

WBG – The World Bank Group

- Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin; Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships
- Mr. Nicholas Bian; International Affairs Officer, World Bank New York Office, 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships

WCO - World Customs Organization

- Mr. Kunio Mikuriya; Secretary General
- Mr. Toshihiko Osawa; Technical Officer Compliance and Facilitation Directorate

WTO - World Trade Organization

- Mr. Raul Torres; Counsellor, Development Division

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