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Closing Statement by

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for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and
Small Island Developing States**

at the LLDC Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Transport

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Astana Economic Forum, Astana, Kazakhstan

Honourable Ministers
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to address this Closing Session of this Ministerial meeting of the Landlocked Developing Countries focused on Trade and Transport.

This Meeting has adopted the Astana declaration that raises very important areas crucial for successfully improving the connectivity of the LLDCs and assisting them to harness their trade potential to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The meeting provided a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learnt and also provided an opportunity to highlight initiatives that support promotion of connectivity and trade in the LLDCs.

Some of the points you stressed in the discussions and in the Astana declaration are very important to recapitulate. There is need for increasing the hardware or physical infrastructure in order to improve the connectivity of the LLDCs. We have heard from our discussion of the various transport projects that are planned, or have already been inaugurated to improve the connectivity of the LLDCs. We heard of initiatives such as the Belt and Road that aim to promote seamless connectivity in all regions. Besides the achievements made, more work needs to be done to mobilize resources to close the infrastructure gap; to build capacity for developing bankable projects, for collection of and monitoring of data and reliable indicators on infrastructure development and for long term planning.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting made it clear that efforts to improve hard infrastructure need to be complemented by similar efforts towards the software in particular trade

facilitation. You called for acceleration of the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement that is important for reducing transit time and costs. I understood that the LLDCs need their capacities strengthened in the implementation of the agreement. Let us all work towards that.

This meeting stressed the importance of structural transformation including increased industrialization, value addition and diversification. The importance to support micro, small and medium sized-enterprises was emphasized. The crucial importance of the services sector to sustainable development was also emphasized with focus on e-commerce, tourism and trade finance. The need for investment facilitation was stressed. The strong emphasis on partnerships and enhanced international support was underscored.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would once again express my deep appreciation to the Government of Kazakhstan for co-organizing this meeting with OHRLs, as well as for hosting us here in Astana.

I wish to also thank the Ministers responsible for trade and transport and all the participants for the dedication and for your active participation and contribution to the success of the meeting.

I wish to also recognize Paraguay for their leadership role as the Global Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries and coordinator of the LLDC Group on matters related to trade and development in Geneva. Thank you for your contribution and dedication and leadership of our LLDC Group.

I also take this opportunity to thank our development partners, the UN system organizations as well as other international and regional organizations for their support to this Meeting and their work in support of the LLDCs.

My deep appreciation also goes to the staff of the Government of Kazakhstan and OHRLLS who worked for weeks to organize this meeting for their dedication and hard work, both of which contributed to the success of the meeting.

Finally, as I indicated at the opening, this meeting marks the beginning of the preparatory process of the comprehensive midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action. We now have the forward-looking outcome - the Astana Declaration that inputs into the preparatory process. I look forward to continue collaborating closely with you in this preparatory process.

It is also vital that all LLDCs prepare national reports on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and to remain fully and constructively engaged in the preparatory process.

As we leave Astana, I also call on you to enhance and foster coherent implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order to ensure that the LLDCs are not left behind. For my part, let me reassure you of UN-OHRLLS full commitment and support to your endeavours.

I wish all of you returning home a safe journey.

I thank you for your kind attention.