

Astana Ministerial Declaration

Adopted at the Ministerial Meeting of Landlocked Developing Countries on Trade and Transport held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 16 and 17 May 2018

We, the Ministers and officials responsible for trade and transport of the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), have met in Astana, Kazakhstan on 16 and 17 May 2018 and have held our deliberations under the theme - *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Landlocked Developing Countries through Connectivity and Trade Facilitation*;

Recalling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the UN General Assembly resolution 72/232 that convenes a high-level comprehensive midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action;

Reaffirming the overarching goal of the Vienna Programme of Action of addressing the special development needs and challenges of landlocked developing countries arising from their landlockedness, remoteness and geographical constraints in a more coherent manner and thus contributing to an enhanced rate of sustainable and inclusive growth, which can contribute to the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty;

Have adopted the following Ministerial Declaration:

Improving Transport Connectivity for the LLDCs

1. We note that some progress has been made by landlocked developing and transit countries in the area of transit transport infrastructure development and acknowledge that despite the improvement, physical infrastructure in road transport, rail transport, ports, inland waterways, pipelines, air transport is still inadequate and missing links are a major problem and need to be addressed urgently;
2. We emphasize the facilitating role that transport connectivity plays in driving regional integration, inclusive and sustainable economic development of LLDCs and recognize the transformative potential of transport for structural economic change in the LLDCs and which can be achieved only if transport infrastructure is built and services are delivered through sound policies, adequate institutions and harmonized norms, standards and practices;
3. We emphasize that the establishment and maintenance of secure, reliable, efficient and quality infrastructure and transit transport systems remains critical for landlocked developing countries to enable them to reduce transport and trading costs, enhance their competitiveness and become fully integrated in regional and global markets;
4. We stress the need to promote harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules, documentation and procedures and enhanced cooperation, including the full and effective implementation of international conventions on transit transport facilitation as well as bilateral, sub-regional and regional agreements, which will lead to faster, cheaper and more reliable transit traffic flow along transit transport routes;
5. We stress that the magnitude of the resources required to invest in infrastructure development and maintenance requires the forging of international, regional, subregional and

bilateral cooperation on infrastructure projects, the effective deployment of international development assistance and multilateral financing in the development and maintenance of infrastructure and strengthening of the role of the private sector;

6. We call upon the international community to provide us with technical support to translate plans into concrete project pipelines, as well as support for individual implementable projects, including for feasibility studies, the negotiation of complex contracts and project management;

7. We call on multilateral and regional development banks to 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;

Promotion of Structural Transformation, Diversification and Value-Addition

8. We underline that, in order for LLDCs to fully utilize their export and trade potential, it is important to undertake measures that promote structural economic transformation capable of reducing the negative impact of their geographical disadvantages and external shocks, creating jobs and ultimately leading to the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions and inclusive and sustainable growth and development;

9. We reaffirm our commitment to intensify our efforts to build productive capacities in manufacturing, agriculture and the services sectors, pursue structural economic transformation, industrialization and encourage export diversification, as a means to poverty eradication, employment generation, inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. We stress that the national development efforts of LLDCs need to be supported by an enabling international economic environment;

10. We stress the critical importance of industrial development for LLDCs, an important source of economic growth, economic diversification, and value addition, as a means to achieve structural and economic transformation and call on development partners, the UN system, including UNIDO to provide support in implementing our industrial and trade policies;

11. We recognize that LLDCs are still heavily dependent on export of primary commodities, which often have low value addition, and their economies remain undiversified, thus making them vulnerable to volatile prices of commodities and external shocks. We call upon the international community to enhance efforts to support LLDCs in diversifying their export base and enhancing value addition to their exports, through - inter alia - the transfer of relevant technologies, support to develop and strengthen their productive capacities and capacity building in developing relevant policies;

12. We stress the importance of LLDCs integrating into regional and global value chains and call on development partners, transit countries and international organizations to help the LLDCs to strengthen their capacity to participate in regional and global value chains and in identifying the best opportunities for developing new products and export markets, given their comparative advantages;

13. We emphasize the fully operationalization of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries to enhance the analytical capabilities of LLDCs, provide home-grown research to cater for their specific needs and support the development efforts of the LLDCs as well as strengthen their collective voice at global level;

Trade and Trade Facilitation

14. We underscore the importance of international trade as an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction, and an important means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as recognized by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (SDGs);

15. We recognize the need to “promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda” to achieve the SDGs as stated in Goal 17.10. We will also seek to promote the concepts of fairness and inclusiveness;

16. We are concerned with the current threats to the Multilateral Trading System including the stalemate in the Doha Development Agenda negotiations and the increase in the adoption of protectionist measures by major trading partners. This situation can further marginalize the LLDCs from the global trade. We therefore call on the WTO Members to strengthen and preserve the multilateral trade system and the negotiating function of the WTO, and to resist all forms of protectionism to promote common prosperity;

17. We underline the importance of addressing the trade-related challenges of the LLDCs that includes reducing trade costs at the border, between borders and behind borders, and addressing other supply-side constraints in order to increase the LLDCs’ trade competitiveness; improving the market access for their products; and enhancing structural transformation in order to help diversify their product and markets;

18. We emphasize that trade facilitation is critical to address the high trade cost faced by the LLDCs. We recognize that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) creates a significant opportunity to improve the speed and efficiency of border procedures, thereby reducing high trade costs faced by the LLDCs and enhancing their participation in the regional and global value chains. We call on all the WTO Members to expedite the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. We encourage the LLDCs and transit countries that have not yet notified their category C measures and their capacity needs to do so to take advantage of the technical assistance opportunities;

19. We call on the LLDCs that have not done so to accede to and ratify relevant international, regional and sub-regional conventions and other legal instruments related to trade facilitation and ensure their effective implementation, with a view to reducing trade costs and delays for the LLDCs and we also encourage transit countries to fully comply with their obligations under the international law related to freedom of transit and trade facilitation;

Acknowledgment

20. We thank the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for its generous financial support, for hosting this meeting and for its hospitality extended to us during our stay in Astana;

21. We express our sincere appreciation for the efforts undertaken by Paraguay in its capacity as the Global Chair of the Group of LLDCs and in its capacity as Coordinator for trade and development issues of the Group of LLDCs in Geneva;

22. We express our gratitude to the substantive support and financial contribution of the UN Office of the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS) to the Meeting;

23. We express our appreciation to the active participation and substantive contributions of the development partners, UN system organizations, international and regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders.