



**United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least  
Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and  
Small Island Developing States  
(UN-OHRLLS)**

**Statement by**

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**High Representative**

**and**

**Under-Secretary-General**

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

**at the Opening Session of the Ministerial Meeting of Landlocked  
Developing Countries (LLDCs) on Trade and Transport**

**16 May 2018**

**Marriott Astana Hotel, Astana  
Kazakhstan**

H.E. Mr. Zhenis Kassymbek, Minister of Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Honorable Ministers

H.E. Ambassador Federico Alberto González Franco, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay and Chair of the Group of LLDCs

Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

H.E. Mr. Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry, African Union Commission

Mr. Yonov Frederick Agah, Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization

Dear Colleagues, representatives of international organizations and regional organizations Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my privilege to be with you.

I am honored to address our opening session of the Ministerial Meeting of the Landlocked Developing Countries on Trade and Transport.

My gratitude goes to the Government and the people of Kazakhstan for all your support in hosting our important meeting.

I especially must thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to the development agenda of the Landlocked Developing countries.

Consistently and over many years, you have contributed to the Trust Fund for the implementation of the Programme of Action for the LLDCs.

You have hosted numerous key meetings for the LLDCs.

Thank you!

15 years ago, in 2003, the Government of Kazakhstan hosted the first International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries.

The conference produced the Almaty Programme of Action (APoA).

15 years ago, this action program identified the special needs and challenges faced by the LLDCs in achieving their development goals.

This was pathbreaking. This fostered international support and partnership for the LLDCs to effectively participate in the international trading and development system.

Thank you again.

Your continuous and consistent commitment and generosity to the LLDCs are widely recognized within the United Nations system.

Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2017, at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the resolution was adopted to hold a High-Level Comprehensive Mid-term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action in 2019.

What is the purpose of this review?

The purpose is to assess the progress made in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

That means, we must identify achievements, obstacles and constraints.

That means we must look at actions that worked, actions that did not work and initiatives needed to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and also what we need to do to better support the LLDCs for the achievement of the Agenda 2030 goals.

Our meeting today marks the beginning of this midterm review process. Our meeting assumes a special significance.

The outcome, the quality of the outcome of this meeting is very important.

Our meeting's findings will feed directly into the outcome of the midterm review as such.

This is our opportunity for a frank dialogue, our opportunity to share experiences - both good and less good - and best practices.

I am very heartened to see this great participation and interest. I extend my sincere appreciations to the LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, UN and international institutions as well as the regional and sub-regional organizations for your participation in this meeting.

We need your participation, partnership and we must pursue vigorously our dialogue!

Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the 2003 ministerial conference, progress has been made!

Since 2003 also a lot of change has taken place- and this may be an understatement of mine!

I tend to look at the glass half full rather than half empty and I do believe in the spirit of "JUST DO IT"

The LLDCs continue to face considerable challenges.

Let us take a look at a few key development indicators.

As a group, the LLDCs have experienced a deceleration in annual GDP growth from 6.6% in 2013 to 4.1% in 2017.

This is disturbing.

A key tenet of Agenda 2030 is to leave no one behind. So, it is important that we look at the causes of this or the WHY this is so and what concerted efforts we ought to make to reverse this situation.

The VPoA offers us a comprehensive framework for action.

The VPoA is also the expression, the commitment of the international community not to leave the LLDCs behind.

The priority areas of ACTION of the VPoA concern transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international Trade and Trade Facilitation, regional Integration and cooperation, with the aim to trigger sustainable structural transformation.

The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda build on that. They also explicitly recognize the challenges LLDCs face.

Most importantly, by signing off on Agenda 2030, the international community once more confirmed the need for continuing and enhanced support to the LLDCs in overcoming their specific challenges on a path toward a sustainable and inclusive development.

For the LLDCs, trade has been identified as key engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction.

We all do know about the role trade plays in development.

Presently, the LLDCs remain marginalized from global trade. The LLDCs share in global trade declined from about 1.2 percent in 2013 to an estimated 0.9 percent in 2017.

The LLDCs share of exports is negligible. Exports are concentrated on a few commodities, mostly natural resources, exported at low value addition and low technology content.

I do not need to tell you that this makes the LLDCs highly vulnerable to external shocks and limits their competitiveness.

We certainly must take a close look at what it will take to support governments in fostering structural economic transformation and in the shift of productive resources towards higher value added and high-productivity sectors.

What support is needed for the LLDCs to improve productive capacities through innovation, technology transfer, experience sharing and encouraging FDI in high-value added production lines?

Honorable ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

A key issue related to this question is the issue of trade and transport infrastructure.

The trade performance of the LLDCs is severely hampered by excessive trade costs.

The high costs is a result of long distances from seaports, poorly developed transport and transit systems and cumbersome border procedures.

In short, the transport infrastructure is characterized by missing links in all of the modes of transport.

Infrastructure development and maintenance remain a top priority and are high on the agenda of the LLDCs.

Needs cannot be addressed through domestic resources alone.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda estimates the annual infrastructure gap in developing countries at about \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.

We must support the LLDCs domestic efforts and mobilize both resources for infrastructure development and maintenance and mobilize partnerships to address capacity constraints.

We must look much more into this.

Let us be inspired by Kazakhstan's success story on transforming from being landlocked to being land linked.

We all must work together, as partners on this from public to private actors, from multilateral to regional development banks, and other financial institutions - the key is working together and partnership!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come to my final two areas of concern: trade facilitation and regional cooperation.

Excellent hard infrastructure alone will not suffice. It is a pre-condition but not the sole determining factor.

Soft infrastructure as I call it is as important. This means we must look at how we can support improvement in administrative procedures for the more efficient movement of goods. How can we strengthen transport and trade facilitation measures?

How can we accelerate ratification and effective implementation of international and regional conventions?

How can we simplify, harmonize and standardize procedures that facilitate efficient movement of goods?

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) provides an opportunity to improve administrative procedures connected to importation and exportation. The agreement has the potential to facilitate transit by the LLDCs. I

I am heartened to see that to date twenty-one LLDCs and twenty-five transit developing countries have ratified the TFA.

The implementation of the TFA is expected to reduce trade costs by around 15% in LLDCs and help address transit challenges.

But - and there always is a BUT - the overall implementation of the TFA by the LLDCs and transit developing countries remains low.

We must look at the causes for this. We must look at the support we ought to extend.

I also wish to encourage the LLDCs to submit the technical assistance needs to the WTO to facilitate acquisition of assistance for implementation of the TFA.

Regional cooperation is another key area for action.

I am highly encouraged by the regional integration efforts made in all regions with LLDCs.

Again, let us build on that momentum and be partners! I wish to encourage development partners, multilateral and regional development banks, and financial institutions to enhance support towards regional initiatives that can link the LLDCs to regional and global markets.

Honorable ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

In concluding, I must once more stress how important the High-level Midterm Review of the VPoA is. This is YOUR chance to take stock, to get heard and to focus on ACTION to take.

The challenge is the challenge of Agenda 2030 - leave no one behind.

I look forward to our dialogue.

I look forward to true partnerships so that we together effectively can support the LLDCS and their peoples in realizing their needs and aspirations.

Thank you.