



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

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Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Side event at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

**REACHING GLOBAL MARKETS: CONNECTING LLDCS’ CITIES
THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AVIATION**

11 July 2018, 13:15 – 14:30 hrs

Conference Room S-2727, UN HQ Secretariat Building

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you all to our side event on Reaching Global Markets: Connecting Landlocked Developing Countries' Cities through Sustainable Aviation.

Our event is organized by the Aviation Partnerships for Sustainable Development and an initiative of ICAO in collaboration with UN-OHRLLS, UN DESA, the World Bank and the Air Transport Action Group who unfortunately can not be with us this time.

The event is also a thematic pre-conference event in the lead up to the high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action which will take place in 2019.

Our substantive discussions and recommendations today are important as they will contribute to the outcome of the midterm review.

Before I give the floor to our speakers, I will spend a short moment framing our discussion.

Sustainable means of transport are crucial for the achievement of most of the SDGs.

They play a crucial role in eradicating poverty, providing access to health and education, facilitating trade and economic transformation, and building resilience.

Prior to Agenda 2030, the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs already agreed on the important role of all modes of transport, including air transport, in the sustainable development of the LLDCs.

For the LLDCs, given their geographical location and isolation, aviation is an important mode of cargo and passenger transport.

It often is an essential lifeline to connect to the rest of the world. It provides direct access to international markets without having to pass through transit countries and increases connectivity with the rest of the world.

In short, aviation helps to overcome geographical disadvantage.

For example, In Ethiopia, horticulture industry has expanded tremendously thanks in part to efficient freighter flights operated by Ethiopian Airlines and expedited handling of special cargo.

In Rwanda, thanks to the rise in aviation, tourism overtook coffee production as the country's largest export in 2016.

I will not even mention the SIDS where air transport is not just a matter of regional and global connection but one of connecting highly dispersed parts of a nation.

Air transport connects, connects countries, cities and people to global networks.

So, the role of air transport in multi-modal national regional and global transport networks is undisputed.

Despite the potential that air transport has for development and connectivity of the most vulnerable countries, LLDCs face major challenges in providing adequate air transportation.

Passenger and freight volumes of LLDCs that are transported by air have increased dramatically in the last decade. On the other hand, air passenger volumes of the LLDCs still represent just 0.9 per cent of world total. Freight volumes represent just 1.3 per cent of world total. These shares are negligible but this also tells us a story.

One of the barriers faced by the LLDCs to increased air traffic is the disproportionately high price for air travel itself, as compared to other modes of transport.

Another key obstacle is the high scale of investment that is needed for infrastructure development, maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement of aged fleet, and upgrading of airports and terminals.

Other challenges to increased air traffic include limited domestic competition, limited capacities and high taxes and fees for infrastructure.

At the same time, some of the LLDCs are making great strides in building up their airlines and air transport facilities. For example, Ethiopia's national airline is becoming Africa's fastest growing and most profitable carrier and Addis Ababa has become an important regional hub in Africa. Zambia is undertaking a construction of new Copperbelt International Airport, worth \$520 million. RwandAir is currently one of Africa's fastest growing airlines and construction works are underway for a new \$800 million airport, which will become Rwanda's biggest international airport, to accommodate the growing air traffic. In Turkmenistan, a new Ashgabat International Airport opened in 2016 after a complete \$2.3 billion redesign and rebuilding.

Improving air connectivity for the LLDCs is critical to helping foster tourism growth and diversifying their economic base. It is important for LLDCs to market their land-based tourism potential and identify practical ways to remove sectoral and economic impediments to air transport and tourism growth through comprehensive national and regional strategies and collaboration.

I look forward to hearing from the distinguished panellists and especially the Member States about your successful experiences, as well as challenges.

Building up aviation infrastructure and upgrading existing ones is a necessary step to modernise the economies of LLDCs.

These efforts need to be complemented with effective implementation of supporting global and regional legal agreements on air transport, as well as supportive national policies to develop and liberalize the air transport sector.

As a side remark, capacity-building for negotiations for air transport agreements may also be something to be looked into!

The development of air transport should also be conceived in the context of establishing efficient multimodal transport systems, which include not only air but also railways, ports, road transport. Multimodal transport systems are critically important for entering regional and global value chains.

To conclude, and I hope I have made a strong case here, the recent Report of the Secretary-General on repositioning of the United Nations Development System to deliver on the 2030 Agenda does draw our attention to the significant gaps in our own capacity to support countries in achieving several SDGs.

I want to highlight SDG 9 on industry and infrastructure. I quote from the report “the system needs to fill these thematic gaps in its coverage of the SDGs and put in place effective mechanisms to ensure the joined-up responses required by the transversal nature of these goals”. (end of quote)

We certainly must focus more on bringing all partners together and pay special attention to the needs of the LLDCs.

Thank you.