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Opening 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**

**Inaugural Meeting of the
International Think Tank for LLDCs**

June 11-12, 2018

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Your Excellency Minister Tsogtbaatar,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been looking forward for a long time to be with you !

I thank you for your very warm welcome to all of us. Ever since my arrival, I enjoy the beauty of your capital and the vast expanses of nature surrounding it as I could see it from the flight.

I am also told you have a vibrant cultural life and marvelous painters!

So, I am truly honored to be with you.

This is a very important inaugural meeting. Today, you inaugurate not just the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries - you inaugurate the first intergovernmental body of the LLDCs Group.

My sincerest appreciation goes to the Government of Mongolia and the International Think Tank for your invitation to OHRLLS to co-organize this event.

It is our great honor to share with you the celebration of the operationalization of the Think Tank.

The call for a Think Tank was first proposed by the Government of Mongolia at a meeting of heads of state of landlocked developing countries in Havana in 2006.

In 2007, the Government of Mongolia hosted the Meeting of Trade Ministers of LLDCs.

Here in Ulaanbaatar you then issued a declaration where the LLDCs agreed to consider setting up an International Think Tank.

It took a while for the vision turn into reality. I sincerely thank the Government of Mongolia for nurturing this vision, for agreeing to host the Think Tank and supporting the interim management.

The Think Tank would not have got off the ground without your generous support. Your continuous, your consistent commitment and generosity to the LLDCs is widely recognized within the United Nations system.

I am encouraged to see and deeply appreciate the presence of Ministers and senior officials from the LLDCs and the partners of the LLDCs who have come here to witness this important milestone.

Excellencies

Geography being geography, it is the lack of territorial access to sea routes of the LLDCs , compounded by remoteness from world markets and thus associated with very high transit costs and risks, constraining export earnings, private capital inflow and thus domestic resource mobilization.

Yes, the very geography does adversely affect overall growth and socioeconomic development.

This, the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014 to 2024 recognizes that.

The program is a holistic and results-oriented programme and reflects an international commitment to addressing the challenges of the LLDCs in a more coherent manner.

Since, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the special needs of the LLDCs and the Vienna Programme of Action is an integral part of the Agenda. Only the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action can lay the ground for the attainment of the SDGs.

The LLDCs continue to make some progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

For example, progress has been made in areas such as acceding to key trade and transport facilitation agreements including the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and reducing transit travel times.

Efforts are also underway to expand and upgrade road and rail transport infrastructure in all the regions with LLDCs.

Efforts are underway to improve energy and ICT access.

Initiatives to speed up transit and border-crossings between LLDCs and transit countries are being taken.

Regional integration efforts are ongoing.

In some LLDCs we can see encouraging progress to diversify and transform their economies on the road to sustainable and inclusive development.

This is good news.

At the same time, there are areas where we have seen slipping back of previously realized advances.

For example, we must take urgent note of the declining share of LLDCs in exports.

We witness de-industrialization and declining foreign investment trends to LLDCs.

LLDCS continue to account for less than 1% of global trade.

LLDCs engagement in international trade is roughly 60% of that of their maritime neighbours.

When we add to that a major infrastructure deficit, including in ICT, transport and energy, these challenges render the achievement of the SDGs questionable if not unattainable for the LLDCs.

It certainly does not facilitate your and our task that at present high and rapidly changing volatility, a multiplicity of crises, climate and environmental risks, a questioning of the established multilateral order and financial and economic vulnerability seem almost the norm.

This surely exacerbates and complicates the challenges LLDCs face from managing proactively the impact of climate change, migration and conflicts.

How to manage in such almost “ perfect storm “ ?

The “ old “ ways of doing , and this is a certainty I have, are not what we need to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

We need to collectively become more creative.

We need solid, verifiable, and relevant data, we need cutting-edge research and analysis to unravel challenges and build bodies of integrated policies.

Nothing short of this is what is needed to now accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the interlinked goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Time is not on our side- we must ACT fast.

There have to be strongly led national efforts integrated with regional and global support. That also implies that LLDCs have strengthened capacity to present and negotiate informed positions and drive consensus building on issues of vital concern to them and speak with one voice in different global fora.

It is against this backdrop where the Think Tank for LLDCs is so critical.

The Think Tank is a tool, a concrete action step to provide you with value-added in addressing these areas of need of the LLDCs.

The Think Tank is well positioned to generate knowledge by LLDCs for LLDCs.

This knowledge has to be owned and national ownership has to translate it into policy action. There is no one-size fits all.

Indeed, the knowledge generated will hopefully help inform the formulation and monitoring of policies you will put in place to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme of Action.

I have no doubt that the Think Tank will contribute to further strengthening capacities of LLDCs and assist in the formulation of joint platforms and common positions for concerted actions.

I also believe that the Think Tank will complement the work of the United Nations in support of the LLDCs.

Here, I must express appreciation and thanks to interim management of the Think Tank which has already delivered on some of these areas.

OHRLLS has worked closely with the Interim Management and we have jointly organized events such as on national mainstreaming of the Vienna Programme of Action and trade facilitation for LLDCs.

Excellencies

In this context, allow me to also update you on the preparations for the High-Level Comprehensive Mid-term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The review meeting takes place in 2019 as called for in the United Nations General Assembly resolution that was adopted last December.

The purpose of the review is to assess the progress made in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action, to identify achievements, obstacles and constraints and identify recommendations to accelerate implementation including achievement of the SDGs by the LLDCs.

The Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport that we held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 16 and 17 May 2018 marked the beginning of the preparatory process for the midterm review meeting.

The outcome of that meeting, the Astana Declaration, is an important input to the preparatory process.

Our inaugural meeting also is very timely as its deliberations will feed into the preparatory process of the Midterm review.

I can not stress enough how important it is that all LLDCs prepare national reports on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and do remain fully and constructively engaged in the preparatory process.

This is your platform, your VOICE moment.

Excellencies

In concluding, allow me to simply say that the key promise to ALL of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind.

The SDGs will just remain words if we cannot ensure that the LLDCS and their peoples are fully included .

Ours is important and urgent work ahead .

We must ensure that we provide support to the LLDCs that is responsive to your needs and helps end extreme poverty, reduce inequalities and advances an inclusive and sustainable development.

I strongly believe the Think Tank will provide you all with tangible and value-added service.

You have my personal assurances that OHRLLS will continue to make every effort to promote the Think Tank.

We will also look at ways how we can enhance our collaboration with the Think Tank including through joint activities to address the special needs of the LLDCs.

OHRLLS , and as mandated by you the member states, will also intensify our efforts to leverage the entire UN system capacities to ensure a coordinated follow-up on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

I once more congratulating you all for the hard work over the years so we can inaugurate the Think Tank today and I call for strong financial and in-kind support for the Think Tank's important service work to you.

I am pleased to inform you that I have received the message of the Secretary General of the United Nations to this meeting. The message is yet another demonstration of the Secretary Generals commitment to the most vulnerable groups of countries, including the LLDCs.

With your kind permission, Mr Chair, I would like to invite my colleague Mr Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy development, coordination and reporting service for the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDs in my office to read out this message.

I thank you.