Statement by Mr. Geoffrey Morgan, CEng MICE, Infrastructure Sustainability and Resilience Specialist, UNOPS

“Under-Secretary General ‘Utoikamanu
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I probably don’t need to tell anyone here that infrastructure is important for development. However the extent to which it is important may not be as well known or appreciated.

Put quite plainly, the lack of infrastructure that is both sustainable and resilient is one of the key issues holding back landlocked developing countries from achieving their full potential, not least of all because it reduces their integration and therefore their international competitiveness.

Well planned, delivered, and managed infrastructure systems are key to LLDC’s development if they are to unlock their full potential and achieve their development aspirations.

Infrastructure underpins the delivery of inclusive sustainable growth as it is an essential foundation of development and poverty elimination through the creation of access to basic services, education, work opportunities, and markets.

Looking at the Sustainable Development Goals, in a recent publication put out by UNOPS and the University of Oxford, the research indicated that out of the 169 development targets that make up the 17 SDGs, 137 of them, about 81%, are influenced by the provision of infrastructure.

Of the many infrastructure sectors, the three sectors which have been identified by UN-OHRLLS and encapsulated in the Vienna Program of Action as the most critical for the development of LLDCs are transport, energy, and digital communications. These three sectors have a significant impact on trade, market performance, and business competitiveness through improved regional and international connectivity.

Furthermore, infrastructure needs to be more than just sustainable through limiting its impact on the environment, it also needs to be resilient to the shocks and stresses that it will face throughout its life.

If it is not resilient then the investments in infrastructure development may be wasted.

It is estimated by the G20’s Global Infrastructure Hub that $97 trillion USD of infrastructure investment is required by 2040 with a large portion of this investment being in LLDCs. We cannot afford to get this wrong and spend this amount again.

To make infrastructure resilient we need to stop thinking about “climate change disasters” and rather focus more on how to manage the hazards and risks which are the result of a changing climate.
Because hazards are not disasters, they only become disasters when infrastructure fails.

Critical infrastructure assets need to be identified, the hazards understood, and the risks managed to reduce the possibility of failure.

To stop hazards from becoming disasters, UNOPS has identified a series of key principles to support the provision of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in LLDCs and other developing countries.

These include a systems based approach where one looks at not only the physical assets but the governance and knowledge which is essential to the overall management of the asset throughout its life-cycle.

We also need to break down sector siloes between infrastructure sectors. A hospital does not provide healthcare services without energy, water for hygiene and sanitation, or roads which can be used to access it. We need to stop thinking of single asset solutions and address the challenges from a systems based approach.

There also needs to be a longer term view of infrastructure investment decisions as infrastructure can lock in development patterns for decades because it is built to last. The choices we make right now will affect the lives of current and future generations.

At UNOPS our foundation of expertise is built on 20 years of delivering infrastructure for our partners around the world in some of the most challenging contexts.

Using this experience we are now working with our partners to create a paradigm shift in the way infrastructure is being planned, delivered, and managed so that it is sustainable and resilient.

Together we are developing the thinking and the tools to help governments make evidence based infrastructure decisions based on emerging global best practice.

To start, we have supported the development of policy briefs on the provision of sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including one that was released this week at COP24 to highlight the importance of infrastructure for development.

One of our key new tools is the Capacity Assessment Tool for Infrastructure - CAT-I.

It is designed to assist governments identify gaps in their capacity to plan, deliver, and manage sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

Based on the gaps identified, the tool can be used to develop a roadmap to build national, state, city or ministerial capacity using a combination of technical and advisory support.

UNOPS is also working in partnership with the Infrastructure Transitions Research Consortium, led by the University of Oxford, to support governments with infrastructure systems modelling to
identify where governments should invest. It does this by identifying specific hazards that critical assets face and what types of infrastructure are needed to ensure that there are sufficient infrastructure services for all beneficiaries for the long term.

It makes the use of big data a reality for all governments to use in decision-making

The challenges faced by LLDC’s are not insurmountable.

Given the importance of infrastructure it is worth looking at new ways of understanding how states can maximise long term development benefits from the large scale investments that are needed.

These decisions are needed now, and they need to be well informed, evidenced based decisions.

Working with partners and utilising best practice from across the globe, we collectively need to stand ready to support governments make these crucial decisions.

Thank you”