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UN-OHRLLS

Statement by

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High Representative

and

Under-Secretary-General

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

Group of Friends of LLDCs

3 October 2018

New York

1:15 – 2:30pm

Venue: 600 Third Avenue, 31st Floor

- Excellency Ambassador Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations
- Excellency Ambassador Julio Cesar Arriola Ramirez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations and Chair of the LLDC Group
- Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt, Executive Director, International Think Tank for LLDCs,
- Excellencies,
- Partners and Friends

I thank you for the opportunity to share with you a briefing on the ongoing preparations for the High-Level Comprehensive Mid-term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action to be held in 2019 as called for by UN-General Assembly resolution 72/232.

I thank Ambassador Kickert for organizing this meeting. Ambassador Kickert, thank you for your country's commitment to the development concerns of the LLDCs!

Austria is of course a developed landlocked country but your country continues to serve as an example to LLDCs of how to overcome the development challenges associated with being landlocked.

Four years ago, Austria graciously hosted the Second UN Conference on the LLDCs.

The outcome was the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs for the Decade 2014 to 2024.

The LLDCs have made some progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

The Report of the Secretary General notes that progress is made in areas such as accession to key trade and transport facilitation agreements which includes the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

To date, 23 out of the 26 LLDCs that are WTO members have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

This demonstrates the importance and the commitment that the LLDCs attach to the Agreement.

Indeed, trade is a lifeline for many LLDCs. Efforts are made to deepen regional integration and a recent example is the case of the African Continental Free Trade Area trying to achieve that.

Efforts are 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.

Linked to that, initiatives to speed up transit and border-crossings between LLDCs and transit countries are underway. Some LLDCs engage in the very critical effort to diversify and transform their economies.

The glass is half full, I would say. But there is a but.

There are areas where we see little improvement and even regression such as declining share of LLDCs exports, de-industrialization trends, and declining foreign investment to LLDCs.

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

Considerable challenges remain to meet the large financing gap needed to close LLDCs' transport infrastructure gap and bring infrastructure up to accepted global standards.

A very significant and urgent challenge - and the Secretary-General spoke to this during the GA high level segment week - concerns climate change and its impact ranging from accelerating desertification to landslides and droughts. Climate change impact poses significant challenges for LLDCs.

These challenges render the achievement of the SDGs challenging for the LLDCs !

Leaving no one behind – as called for by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development— and improving the lives of over 480 million people living in LLDCs will require strong political will and strengthened partnerships.

Excellencies,

We are five years into the implementation of the VPoA. Time is indeed now for a thorough stock-taking in order to focus and be strategic for the next five years.

The Midterm Review of the VPoA gives us that chance. It gives us the chance to comprehensively assess the implementation of the VPoA, identify what is going well, what did not work and why, where major challenges are remaining, and propose action-oriented recommendations on how to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA.

Implementation of the VPoA is intrinsic to achieving the SDGs and accelerating VPoA implementation means accelerating SDG achievement.

One of the midterm review outcomes will be to adopt an inter-governmentally negotiated political declaration.

As you are all aware, OHRLLS was mandated by the General Assembly to co-ordinate the preparations of the Midterm Review.

Accordingly, we are fully engaged in undertaking substantive and logistical preparations for the Review.

The preparatory process for the Midterm Review involves preparations at national, regional and global levels.

The LLDCs are preparing national reports on the implementation of the VPoA. This is very important because we must ensure strong national ownership for this process.

Some LLDCs have already submitted their national reports. The national reports will feed into the preparation of the regional review meetings and contribute to a workable and result producing outcome document.

With regard to regional reviews, OHRLLS is closely collaborates with the UN regional commissions to organize the regional review meetings –

for Euro-Asia we are working with UNESCAP and UNECE;
for Africa we are working with UNECA; and
for Latin America we are working with ECLAC.

The regional review meetings will be held during the first half of 2019. The discussion on the dates and venue of the respective regional meetings are at an advanced stage. The venues will be confirmed in due course.

I very much thank the Chair of the LLDC Group, Paraguay for offering to host the Latin America Regional Review meeting.

I must stress that the regional level meetings are critical for the preparatory process. I am confident they will come up with rich, practical and comprehensive suggestions that will feed into the global level preparations.

OHRLLS in corporation with partners will also undertake background analytical work in preparation for the regional review meetings.

So where do we stand in global level preparations?

Global level preparations involve preparations of thematic events including preconference events and the inter-agency substantive joint work. A number of preconference events have already taken place.

The Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Transport that was held in Astana, Kazakhstan in May 2018 marked the first event in this intensive preparatory process.

My gratitude goes to the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting the meeting.

The meeting's outcome document, the Astana Declaration, forms an important input into the preparatory process. It focusses on actions to Improve Transport Connectivity for the LLDCs, promote Structural Transformation, Diversification and Value-Addition and increase trade and Trade Facilitation.

We then held the inaugural meeting of the International Think Tank for the LLDCs in June 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Here my gratitude goes to the Government of Mongolia for hosting the meeting. The meeting adopted an outcome document that just as the Astana declaration will feed into the preparatory process.

The meeting discussed amongst other issues, foreign direct investment and economic diversification, ICT connectivity, infrastructure development, transit corridors and trade facilitation.

OHRLLS also - and together with Paraguay, Austria and the Sustainable Energy for All - organized a side event in the margins of the HLPF focused on SDG 7 sustainable energy.

The event issued important recommendations for accelerating the energy transition in the LLDCs.

OHRLLS in collaboration with partners organized a further HLPF side event on Reaching Global Markets: Connecting Landlocked Developing Countries' Cities through Sustainable Aviation. Again, this provided us with important recommendations to feed in the preparatory process.

And what are we planning for now ?

OHRLLS, in collaboration with partners, is also planning to organize some preconference thematic events including promoting trade and transport corridors, ICT connectivity, and structural economic transformation.

OHRLLS works very intensively on the important issue of Trade Facilitation. A joint training workshop on transit issues will be held in October at the WTO in the sidelines of the meeting of the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee.

We are also working on a project with the WTO, World Bank, World Customs Organization and other partners on enhancing border cooperation. The first workshop will be held in Southern Africa in November 2018. This workshop will be replicated to other regions.

Let me now come to work here in New York.

It is important that here in New York, that we continue to dialogue on the Midterm Review of the VPoA. Resources permitting, we plan to organize a dedicated retreat bringing together LLDCs, transit countries and development partners to consult on the Midterm Review.

We also plan to continue to facilitate dialogue between permanent representatives of LLDCs with other international organisations.

We heard it throughout the GA week- we live in a time where partnerships is so key to achieving results. I place great importance on OHRLLS facilitating dialogue and partnerships.

The dialogues we propose will be an opportunity for organisations to make presentations on their activities to LLDC representatives and hear suggestions on how to better tailor their support to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA.

OHRLLS organized the sixth inter-agency consultative group meeting on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA, in April this year in Geneva. The meeting was able to bring together relevant agencies to consult and plan together on the organization of the Midterm Review. Another inter-agency consultative group will be held in November to further consult on the preparations of the Midterm review as well as coordinate pre-conference events that we can jointly work on to inform the substantive preparations of the Midterm Review.

I am encouraged to share with you that the agencies are taking a keen interest in the Midterm Review. We have already started to receive requests for side events to be held during the Midterm Review.

Regarding the host for the High-Level Comprehensive Midterm Review of the VPoA, while we are still in consultation with potential hosts, New York will be the fall-back option.

I would like to emphasize once more that the preparatory process of the midterm review is designed to ensure we have maximum participation of all relevant stakeholders from the LLDCs, to transit and donor countries, private sector, UN system organizations, international and regional organizations, academia, civil society and others. Given the importance of the private sector in the implementation of the VPoA, we also plan to organize private sector focused events.

It is a true “let’s do it together “spirit!

Excellencies,

The General Assembly mandated that costs relating to the midterm review and its preparation be financed through voluntary contributions.

OHRLLS and its staff has been very active undertaking resource mobilization. So far contributions have been received from the Governments of the Peoples Republic of China, Republic of India, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Austria. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to these countries for their generosity.

I would like to underscore that OHRLLS will rely on the support of your governments in the preparatory process of the Midterm Review.

I wish to invite you to support the preparatory process of the Midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action including through assisting LLDCs in participating fully and effectively in the Midterm Review and the preparatory process.

Allow me in concluding my brief to you to spend a moment on the International Think Tank for landlocked developing countries.

Its establishment and inauguration as the first intergovernmental body dedicated to landlocked developing countries marked an important milestone in efforts to address LLDCs special needs.

I participated in the inauguration and intense discussions revealed the important role that the Think Tank will play to undertake comprehensive research and provide impartial advice, analysis and homegrown solutions to LLDCs. Solutions owned by the LLDCs!

I have no doubt that the work of the Think Tank will help to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I call for your financial and in-kind support for the Think Tank's important work to support the LLDCs.

I assure you of UN-OHRLLS' full commitment and support to the Think Tank. We plan to undertake joint activities.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I said at the outset, the glass is half full. It is up to all of us now to work hard to make it full and meet what we promised the 2030 Agenda: we leave no one behind.

This promise we made will not be kept if the LLDCs are left behind or worse left out.

We have no time to waste and important work ahead of us to ensure that we provide support to the LLDCs that can help them end extreme poverty, reduce inequalities and advance sustainable development.

I pledge my personal commitment and that of my office to ensure a successful midterm review process and OHRLLS' continued support in addressing the challenges faced by the LLDCs.

Thank you.