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Opening Statement by

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Ambassadorial Meeting of the Landlocked Developing Countries

18 December 2018 at 10:00 to 13:00hrs

Conference Room 4

Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues

I wish to thank the Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Julio Cesar Arriola, for inviting me to brief the Group. I place great importance to these meetings as they provide us the opportunity to engage and ensure that we remain on the same page as we continue to join forces to advance the interest of the LLDCs in the international sphere.

Excellencies,

Today's meeting is as we come to the end the year and prepare ourselves for an important year ahead. This is an opportune time for us to reflect on the journey we have embarked on during 2018 and also map our way forward as we approach 2019. I will therefore update you on the developments that unfolded during the year and also share with you the plan for the 2019. 2019 marks an important year for the LLDCs as we will be embarking on the activities leading to the Comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action planned for December 2019.

At the outset I would like to thank you all for your unwavering commitment to the cause of the LLDCs and your active engagement in the global processes.

Let me highlight some of the 2018 key outcomes of importance to the LLDCs. The ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up adopted an inter-governmentally agreed document included important references on LLDCs. Closely linked to this was the Secretary-General's High-level Meeting on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was held during the high-level week of the General Assembly in September. The Secretary General presented a Strategy for financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that will guide the work of the UN system in this area and encouraged all stakeholders to contribute to the strategy during this meeting. A roadmap is being prepared on its implementation.

The Global Infrastructure Forum was held in Bali, Indonesia, in October under the theme "Unlocking Inclusive, Resilient, and Sustainable Technology-Driven infrastructure". OHRLLS could not participate in the meeting but closely followed the discussions. The outcome statement adopted at the meeting stressed issues of importance to the LLDCs including: increasing technical

assistance and advisory services for knowledge creation and knowledge transfer and the need to prioritize efforts to identify infrastructure and capacity gaps and mobilize infrastructure investment and finance to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing states and African countries.

The High-level Political Forum adopted a Ministerial Declaration reflecting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. I commend the 6 LLDCs that presented their Voluntary National Reviews during HLPF and the 10 LLDCs that have committed to presenting next year. I encourage more LLDCs to sign off for VNRs.

Other events and meetings of importance to the LLDCs held this year include the COP24 Climate Change Conference that just concluded in Poland. The conference adopted a set of implementing guidelines for the Paris Agreement aimed at keeping global warming below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels. OHRLLS organized several side events during the conference including one on SDGs and Climate change: Challenges and Opportunities for landlocked developing countries. Discussions in the event highlighted the impact of climate change in LLDCs and underscored the need for adequate and accessible financing, technical assistance and technologies to support the adaptation and mitigation efforts of LLDCs. Although climate change is not a specific priority area in the VPoA, it affects most of the priority areas of the programme in particular infrastructure development and maintenance and structural economic transformation and should therefore be given special consideration.

The UNCTAD World Investment Forum held in October 2018 was organized under the overall theme “Investing in Sustainable Development”. Together with UNCTAD, OHRLLS organized a luncheon on Promoting FDI to LLDCs. Participants made recommendations on reforms that can promote and facilitate investment in the LLDCs and these recommendations will feed into the preparations of the Mid-Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The Migration Conference also just ended in Marrakech, Morocco and it adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Although OHRLLS could not participate in the Conference, we followed the discussions closely.

OHRLLS organized the fifth inter-agency consultative group meeting on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA on the 14th November 2018. The meeting had the opportunity to review the support of UN system to the implementation of the VPoA and further consulted on the preparations of the Midterm Review. The UN system and other international organizations have expressed interest in supporting the preparatory process and the Midterm Review itself by organizing side events during the Midterm Review as well as providing analytical work to input into the preparatory process.

Excellencies,

Now looking at the year ahead, while we will continue engagement and support to the Group on the relevant UN processes and other international activities, the main focus for this year will be on the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The Second Committee of the General Assembly recently adopted a resolution on the Follow-up on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action that includes modalities for the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action. It was decided that the midterm review of the VPoA would be held in early December 2019 for a duration of 2 days in New York and will be chaired by the President of the General Assembly.

The President of the General Assembly has also been mandated to lead intergovernmental consultations on the outcome document. OHRLLS in close consultation with the relevant United Nations system organizations was mandated to prepare a draft outline of the outcome document of the midterm review so as to facilitate the intergovernmental consultations, taking into account the outcomes of the regional meetings and the reports of the Secretary-General.

The President of the General Assembly recently appointed H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN and H.E. Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of Bhutan as co-facilitators for the outcome document. I wish to once again congratulate them on their appointment and assure them of OHRLLS' full support. I have already held a meeting with the co-facilitators to discuss the roadmap of the midterm review.

On regional review meetings, OHRLLS is working with regional commissions to organize the three meetings, for Euro-Asia region, Africa region and Latin America region. The Euro-Asia regional meeting will be the first to take place on 11-12 February 2019 at ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok. The Africa regional review meeting will be held on 18 and 19 March 2019 in Marrakesh, Morocco back to back with ECA's Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. The Latin America regional meeting will be held in June and I thank Paraguay for offering to host meeting in their country.

On national level preparations, we have so far received national reports on the implementation of the VPoA from 12 LLDCs and I appeal to the remaining countries to submit their national reports. These reports are an important input to the regional and the global preparations.

As part of the review process, we are also organizing thematic events. Thematic events so far organized include the Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport that was held in May in Astana; the Inaugural Conference of the International Think Tank for LLDCs; the 2 HLPF side events focused on energy and aviation; and an event on Promoting foreign direct investment to LLDCs held at the World Investment Forum in partnership with UNCTAD; a workshop on transit issues held at the WTO in the sidelines of the meeting of the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee; and a workshop on enhancing border cooperation held in South Africa and the side event on climate change held during COP24. ESCAP, UNECE, UNCTAD, the Think Tank and other organizations have also organized LLDC focused pre-conference events.

In collaboration with partners, we are also planning to organize additional preconference thematic events including: an Expert Group Meeting on Trade facilitation measures in landlocked developing countries; an event on Strengthening ICT Connectivity and digital inclusion in LLDCs; Expert Group Meeting on Promoting science, technology, innovation and policies for achieving structural economic transformation and sustainable development in LLDCs; and an event on Promoting Euro-Asian Transport and Trade Corridors.

We also plan to organize a dedicated retreat bringing together LLDCs, transit countries, development partners and UN system and other international organizations to consult on the Midterm Review and the retreat is planned to be held in April 2019.

Let me also highlight that the Secretary-General has been mandated to submit to the General Assembly at its 74th session a progress report on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for its high-level midterm review. OHRLLS will prepare the draft report with inputs from the LLDCs and the relevant organizations.

Excellencies,

The LLDCs have exhibited some progress towards the SDGs, however their progress is slow as they mostly lag behind the averages of all the developing countries and of the world. Real GDP growth for LLDCs continued to decline, reaching 2.8% in 2016, its lowest level since 1998. The LLDCs remain highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. On the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action, the share of the LLDCs' global merchandise trade remains below 1 percent. The LLDCs' exports continue to be concentrated on very limited number of products. Addressing high trade costs remain fundamental to integrating the LLDCs into global trade.

To-date, 24 out of 26 LLDCs that are WTO Members have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement – this is a great achievement that we applaud. It is important to note that the implementation of this Agreements by LLDCs is however still lagging due to capacity constraints. The ratification of other relevant international conventions by both LLDC and the transit countries has been relatively low over the review period and in this regard, it is important to continue to support these countries. Economic blocks and initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area and the China-led Belt and Road Initiative provide opportunities for LLDCs' further integration into regional trade. Infrastructure, in particular, transport, energy and ICT also remain inadequate. Whilst ODA remains an important source of financing to the LLDCs, it is insufficient to address the needs of the LLDCs particularly their huge infrastructure needs. FDI, which is vital for structural transformation is also low and concentrated on a few countries and on the extractive sectors.

In view of the limited progress in many of the priority areas of the VPoA, the outcome document has to be ambitious and come up with measures that can assist the LLDCs to further advance implementation of the priorities of the VPoA, including infrastructure development, trade

facilitation, and structural transformation in particular enhanced investment and technical assistance. Greater cooperation between the LLDCs and transit countries and deepened regional integration to improve the trade potential of LLDCs is important.

As we also prepare to engage in the negotiations of the outcome document, I wish to propose that the Group establish a core group of negotiators at expert level who will work together and support each other throughout the negotiations of the outcome document of the Midterm Review. This will strengthen the voice of the LLDCs in the negotiation and it will also be important for continuity in other negotiations.

Excellencies,

As you are aware following the Second UN Conference, OHRLLS worked on developing appropriate indicators to monitor progress in the implementation of the Vienna Programme in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Group. The indicators include about 90 quantitative and 11 qualitative ones and covered international trade, trade facilitation, infrastructure, productive capacities and structural economic transformation. The set of indicators were presented to the High-Level Meeting on the Follow-up to the Second United Nations Conference on LLDCs held in Livingston as well as at the retreat and ambassadorial meetings held here. These indicators are used annually to prepare the Secretary General's reports and in assessing progress in the implementation of the VPoA. We have since 2016 been preparing and publishing an annex of the SG report that contains these indicators.

I wish to now highlight other important meetings for the LLDCs that will take place next year.

The Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation will be held from 20-22 March 2019 in Buenos Aires. The Conference will be held under the overarching theme "Role of South-South cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: challenges and opportunities".

The UN ECOSOC's fourth Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up will take place from 15-18 April 2019.

The high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the ECOSOC, will be held from 9 to 18 July 2019 under the theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". We have requested the President of ECOSOC for a dedicated session for LLDCs & LDCs and will advise of the final decision in due course.

The Global Review of Aid for Trade will take place from 3 to 5 July 2019 at the WTO under the theme "Supporting Economic Diversification and Empowerment for Inclusive, Sustainable Development through Aid for Trade".

There will be several high-level events taking place in September 2019. The UN SDG Summit will take place on 24 and 25 September 2019 and it will assess progress achieved so far since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015 and provide leadership and guidance on the way forward that would help accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

The UN 2019 Climate Summit will convene under the theme 'A Race We Can Win in. A Race We Must Win,' and aim to mobilize political and economic energy at the highest levels to advance climate action that will enable implementation of many of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The UN General Assembly will also hold a high-level dialogue on financing for development (FfD) on 26 September 2019.

The second and the third sessions of the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction will be held in March/April and August 2019 respectively.

OHRLLS is currently organizing a joint OHRLLS/LLDC Bureau consultative meeting with the World Bank Group to discuss priorities of the LLDCs. The meeting is planned for the first half of 2019.

Let me conclude my remarks by assuring you of my office's commitment to the success of the midterm review of the VPoA and I will continue to work closely with the chair in this process.

I thank you for your attention.