Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to address the Annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries. I thank you for your invitation.

Our participation this year is a very special one because it is the first time that the International Think Tank is participating in the Annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers of LLDCs as a full-fledged international intergovernmental organization. The International Think Tank is also the only intergovernmental organization of the Group of LLDCs at the United Nations.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you about recent developments at the International Think Tank for LLDCs and shed light on what we plan to achieve in the coming three years.

2018 marked a historic year for the International Think Tank for LLDCs as we successfully transformed from an organization under an interim management scheme to a fully operational intergovernmental organization.

As of today, 12 LLDCs have acceded or ratified the multilateral agreement on the establishment of the ITT for LLDCs. The current member states of the International Think Tank are Afghanistan, Armenia, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Paraguay and Tajikistan.

Taking this opportunity I also would like to call on landlocked developing countries that have not yet ratified the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, to do so at its earliest convenience.

After the entry into force of the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of the International Think Tank for the Landlocked Developing Countries on 6 October 2017, the Secretariat of the International Think Tank worked actively on the establishment of the Board of Governors, consisting of representatives from all member states that are Party to the multilateral agreement on the establishment of the International Think Tank.

After the appointment of Governors for the Board by all member states, the Board was officially set up according to Article VI of the multilateral agreement in May 2018.
The first meeting of the Board was organized on 21 May 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

As stated in Article 6 of the Multilateral Agreement, the Board of Governors is the highest authority of the International Think Tank. At its first meeting, the Board of Governors discussed key issues relating to the operation and management of the International Think Tank and took a number of decisions that are key to the functioning of the International Think Tank. These include the following:

i) Mongolia and Paraguay were elected Chairperson and Vice-chair.
ii) The draft General principles and rules of procedure of the Board of Governors were discussed and approved.
iii) Understanding was reached on the financial issues of the ITT for LLDCs, including the setting up of a Trust Fund and the application of the least cost approach in funding operational activities.
iv) The organizational structure of the ITT Secretariat was set up.
v) The Executive Director of the ITT for LLDCs was elected.
vi) The Board agreed on the text of the Host Country Agreement and authorized the Executive Director to sign the host country agreement with the Government of Mongolia.
vii) The Chairperson of the Board was requested to send a letter to bilateral and multilateral donors asking for support for the ITT for LLDCs.
viii) Member states of the Multilateral Agreement were requested to make voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund of the International Think Tank for LLDCs.

On 11 June 2018, the intergovernmental inaugural meeting of the ITT for LLDCs was successfully organized by the International Think Tank in cooperation with the Government of Mongolia and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

The Meeting was not only a symbolic event for the inauguration of the ITT for LLDCs, but was at the same time a platform for thematic multilateral discussions on issues of relevance to LLDCs such as foreign direct investment and economic diversification of LLDCs; ICT-Connectivity and LLDCs; and Infrastructure development, transit transport corridors and trade facilitation: In connection with Challenges and opportunities of LLDCs.

The meeting adopted as outcome document the Ulaanbaatar Declaration that contributes to the future work of the ITT and it will also be an input to the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

For the upcoming 3 years the ITT will work towards achieving four major goals.
1. Put the ITT for LLDCs on a sound financial footing;
2. Enlarge and extend the membership of LLDCs;
3. Further expand the networking and outreach activities; enhance cooperation with development partners, both from developing, in particular transit countries, and developed countries, as well as civil society actors, such as international organizations, relevant research institutes and universities. Last but not least
4. Provide high quality research products and provide relevant policy making solutions and recommendations for LLDCs.

I would like to ask and encourage all LLDCs, development partners and Friends of LLDCs, to support and effectively utilize the International Think Tank for sharing experiences and know-how, research and addressing challenges in implementing both the VPoA and SDGs as noted in the Article 64 (j) of the VPoA.

Excellencies,

2019 will be the vital year for LLDCs to review the mid-term implementation of the VPoA. The International Think Tank will effectively contribute to the mid-term review process.

I can reassure you that the ITT for LLDCs is making great efforts in this direction. We work very closely with the Office of High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS under the able leadership of USG Ms. Fekitamoeloa.

Our collaboration with UN system organizations covers a wide range of issues. Let me just give you the latest example of our cooperation in support of LLDCs.

The International Think Tank conducted a research project with the support of the PGTF of the Group of 77 on “Economic diversification of LLDC: Case of Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal and Paraguay” under the Priority 5: Structural economic transformation of the VPoA, which will be launched within this year.

The ITT for LLDCs in collaboration with UNCTAD is going to organize a sub-regional workshop on “Fostering Structural Transformation and Export Diversification in Selected Asian Landlocked Developing Countries” as part of a capacity-building project to promote structural transformation and export diversification in energy-exporting LLDCs in Asia on 16-17 October 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Early 2019, the ITT for LLDCs is planning to organize an inter-regional technological capacity building meeting in cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The outcome of these meetings will be an input to the mid-term review of the VPoA in 2019.

We hope your Governments will actively participate in these events.

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasize our full commitment to the cause of LLDCs and we look forward to your recommendations and guidance for a coherent approach in the implementation of the ITT for LLDCs’ agenda, especially with regard to the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme of Action. We stand ready to support you in this endeavour.

Thank you for your kind attention.