Report of the Annual Ministerial Meeting of Landlocked Developing Countries

Held on 28 September 2018 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York
Summary

On 28th September 2018, the Foreign Ministers of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) held their 17th Annual Meeting in New York in the sidelines of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly’s high-level general debate. H.E. Mr. Luis Alberto Castiglioni, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay chaired the Ministerial Meeting in his capacity as the Global Chair of the Group of LLDCs.

The Meeting was held under the theme “Revitalizing partnerships to enhance the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development.” The meeting was aimed at reviewing progress in the implementation of the Vienna programme of Action (VPoA) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, identify challenges and mechanisms for enhancing collaboration between all the stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda.

The meeting noted the limited and slow progress achieved in the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development by the LLDCs and expressed concern that LLDCs will fall short of achieving the SDGs if implementation is not accelerated.

The meeting noted that the LLDCs are still confronted with many challenges including: (1) marginalization from global trade and value chains, (2) inadequate infrastructure, including transport, ICT and energy; (3) unpredictable transit regimes; (4) declining finance, (5) inadequate institutional and technical capacities; and (6) high trade costs. In this regard, the Meeting emphasized the need for all the stakeholders to join forces to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and also called for enhanced support to the LLDCs. The meeting underscored the need to mainstream the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into national development strategies and also underscored the need to strengthen synergies between the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) and other global development outcomes, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement on Climate Change and others.

The meeting welcomed the recently established International Think Tank for LLDCs (ITT) in Mongolia as the first ever intergovernmental body of the LLDCs and urged all LLDCs and stakeholders to support it. The ITT was encouraged to undertake research and capacity development for the LLDCs and strengthen research collaboration with relevant international organizations.

On the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the implementation of the VPoA to be held in December 2019, the Ministers emphasized that the midterm review should identify innovative ways to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda and also stressed that the outcome should be ambitious, action oriented, and concise.

The meeting was attended by Ministers and representatives for LLDCs, transit countries, and development partners, UN agencies and other regional and international organizations.

The Meeting adopted a Ministerial Declaration.
A. Introduction

1. The Government of the Republic of Paraguay and Chair of the LLDC Group in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High-Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) organized the 17th Meeting of Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries that was held on 28th September 2018, in New York. The Meeting was held in the sidelines of the 73rd session of the General Assembly’s high-level general debate.

2. H.E. Mr. Luis Alberto Castiglioni, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Paraguay chaired the meeting in his capacity as the Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries.

B. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by delegates, including Ministers and representatives, of the following LLDCs, transit countries and development partners: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Ethiopia, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, Norway, Paraguay, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Representatives from The African Development Bank, The International Think Tank for LLDCs (ITT), The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) also attended.

4. The complete list of participants is presented as annex 3 of this report.

C. Opening Session

5. The meeting was officially opened by H.E. Mr. Luis Alberto Castiglioni, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Paraguay, in his capacity as Chair of the Group of LLDCs. Opening statements were also made by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa, President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

6. In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. Luis Alberto Castiglioni, highlighted that despite efforts by the LLDCs to achieve the objectives of the VPoA and 2030 Agenda, significant challenges remain that must be addressed collectively. He noted that the structural challenges faced by LLDCs that are a result of their geography were detrimental to their efforts to be competitive, create employment and integration into the world trade. He emphasized that it was the primary role of LLDCs to implement policies that can facilitate achieving sustainable development, but he also stressed the fundamental role of partnerships particularly of transit countries, development partners, the private sector and
international organizations. He urged LLDCs to direct their efforts towards accelerating economic transformation within the framework of respect for the environment. He emphasized that the 2030 Agenda, and the VPoA constitute commitment and tools by the international community to meet the special needs of LLDCs and to eradicate poverty in all forms and dimensions and ensure that no one was left behind.

7. Mr. Castiglioni thanked the development partners, regional and international organizations for their support to the LLDCs. He also thanked the Government of Kazakhstan and OHRLLS for organizing the Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport, held in Astana, that marked the beginning of the preparatory process for the Comprehensive High-Level Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Program of Action.

8. He also informed the meeting of the activities that Paraguay participated in to promote the interests of LLDCs as the Chair of the Group of LLDCs throughout the year and these included: the initiative of the Secretary General in the Repositioning of the United Nations Development System, the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

9. He further informed that Paraguay intends to host the Latin America Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Mid-Term Review in mid-2019. In concluding his remarks, he underscored that the LLDCs can achieve a solid foundation for the eradication of poverty, generation of decent employment and inclusive economic growth, and he emphasized the need to accelerate the implementation of integrated and sustainable economic and social plans and programs.

10. **H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa, the President of the United Nations General Assembly** in her remarks recognized the challenges faced by LLDCs face in achieving the SDGs. She stated that the dedicated efforts by LLDCs must be complemented with strong multilateral partnerships to turn LLDCs into “land linked” countries in the fastest possible time. The President reiterated her firm support for the high-level midterm review of the VPoA and conveyed her full support to ensuring its success. The President also invited the Group to take full advantage of the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40) conference to be held in Buenos Aires in March 2019 and ensure that the outcomes of the conference respond to LLDCs’ interests. In concluding her remarks, the President highlighted the importance of the seven priority themes of the 73rd session to LLDCs and invited the Group to contribute towards its achievement.

11. In her remarks, **Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)** thanked His Excellency Luis Alberto Castiglioni for Paraguay’s excellent leadership and she also thanked H.E. Mr. Julio César Arriola Ramírez for his dedication to the work of the LLDC Group in New York. She also thanked the LLDC Bureau for their contribution to the work of the Group.

12. She noted that the LLDCs exhibited some progress towards the SDGs, however their progress is slow and mostly lag behind the averages of the developing countries and of the world. She noted that the real GDP growth for LLDCs continued to decline and had
reached the lowest level in 2016 since 1998. She highlighted that the LLDCs remain highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and noted that the situation compromised their development and their food security.

13. On progress achieved in the implementation of the VPoA she noted that the LLDCs’ share of global merchandise trade remains below one percent and exports were concentrated on very limited products. She emphasized the need to address the high trade costs faced by the LLDCs and she emphasized the importance of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in dealing with high trade costs faced by the LLDCs. She noted that 22 LLDCs ratified the WTO TFA but expressed concern that implementation lag behind due to capacity challenges.

14. On infrastructure development, she pointed out that LLDCs lag behind the transit countries and the world in terms of paved roads and the rail density as LLDCs only have 12% of the global density for paved roads and for the railways they only have just over a third. On access to electricity, she noted that the average proportion of the population with access to electricity was about 51% compared to the world average of 87% in 2016. She also highlighted that LLDCs also continue to face high costs of broadband which also hampers their development and erode the competitive edge of LLDCs.

15. She called for innovative ideas to address LLDCs challenges particularly in the upcoming midterm review of the VPoA. She emphasized the importance of the United Nations Country teams in providing tailor made responses to the LLDCs’ priorities and she also emphasized the importance of national ownership.

16. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu underscored that OHRLLS continued to support the LLDC Group as well as collaborate with other organizations to build the capacity of LLDCs. She informed the meeting that OHRLLS was working with the Chair of the LLDCs and the WTO Secretariat to organization a joint workshop on transit issues to be held in October 2019 at the WTO. She also informed about a project on enhancing border cooperation being implemented in collaboration with the WTO, World Bank, WCO and other partners. The first workshop under this project will be held in Southern Africa in November 2018.

17. She commended the Chair of the Group and the LLDC Group for their efforts in making their voices heard on issues of importance to LLDCs and encouraged them to maintain the momentum in the upcoming global processes such as the Global Infrastructure Forum, the World Investment Forum, the 24th Conference of Parties to the UN-Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 2019 ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum and the 2019 High-Level Political Forum). She also commended the six LLDCs that presented their Voluntary National Reviews during the 2018 HLPF. She also congratulated the LLDCs on the inauguration of the International Think Tank for LLDCs and she assured the Think Tank of OHRLLS support.

18. The UNDP Administrator, Mr. Achim Steiner, underlined the importance that UNDP attaches to the cause of the LLDCs, noting that UNDP has been part of the development infrastructure in many LLDCs for more than three decades. He postulated that the principle entry point for UNDP is assisting countries in realizing their development objectives, including through institutional capacity building to implement the SDGs. He noted the need for LLDCs to collaborate with neighbours to achieve economies of scale
and build transport, energy and ICT infrastructure as well as the challenges of connectivity in today’s digital world.

19. He informed that UNDP, in collaboration with other UN agencies and international organizations, has engaged in 12 LLDCs to support the mainstreaming of the SDGs, including through identifying integrated policy approaches to expedite progress; discussing innovative financial mechanisms; and reviewing data and capacity of national statistical systems.

20. He informed that UNDP is also engaged in individual countries through specific programmes, such as in Burkina Faso where the Roadmap for the implementation of the SDGs focused on renewable energy development as a key driver for progress towards the SDGs. He recalled that in Armenia, the SDG roadmap calls attention to the importance of growing trade and investment connections to promote a more diversified economy, as well as development of ICT connectivity and services sector to address the high trade costs. He also noted that the Government of Armenia and the UN have established an Innovation Lab to leverage innovation towards SDG achievement. He indicated that in Mongolia, UNDP with other organizations proposed integrated actions to address air pollution, land degradation, and implications of demographic trends on public expenditures and service provision and that UNDP is also supporting the government to mainstream the SDGs within the government budget. He concluded by congratulating the LLDCs on the establishment of the International Think Tank for the LLDCs.

21. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, noted that in the first part of this millennium, LLDCs were experiencing average growth of 7%, however the trade and investment situation of the LLDCs has deteriorated in recent years. He informed that the LLDCs’ share of global trade has declined from a high of 1.1% in 2014 to 0.8% in 2016. He also recalled that FDI flows to LLDCs substantially declined from $36 billion in 2011 to $24 billion in 2016, accounting for only 1.4% of global FDI flows. He cautioned that unless concrete action is done to reverse trends, there is a real threat that many LLDCs may not realize the targets of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda by the deadlines. He urged for new and revitalized partnerships in order to reverse the trends. Mr. Kituyi cautioned that since 2013, the rate of poverty reduction has slowed and the poverty declines achieved in the 2000s can soon be reversed due to recent trends and that uncertainties to rules-based trade regime reduce the possibilities of the most vulnerable countries to engage in global trade. He recalled that LLDCs trade 30% less than their coastal neighbours. He urged Ministers to emphasize the importance of stable, open, predictable, rules-based trading system. He noted that the recent escalation of tariffs, such as between US and China, has the impact of reducing the margins for commodity producing developing countries for the items confronted in the trade war.

22. In terms of specific recommendations, Mr. Kituyi urged that there is need to pay more attention to trade and transit facilitation, to complement infrastructure development. He noted that it is encouraging that many LLDCs as well as transit countries ratified the TFA but called for more capacity building to implement the TFA provisions, in line with the agreements reached in Bali. He posited that participation in regional transport and trade facilitation initiatives, such as corridors, is needed and noted that significant recent developments in various regions are steps in right direction, given proper structure and political engagement. He cautioned that recent statistics show that LLDCs that increased trade also increased indebtedness. He called for more Aid for Trade resources, as a
contribution to diversification of LLDC economies and emphasized the importance of developing clear policy on facilitating investment and trade and building productive capacities.

23. He noted that UNCTAD is working on engaging with partners on how to reverse the trends in declining FDI flows, including through upcoming dedicated sessions during the World Investment Forum 2018 looking at how to strengthen impact investment in most vulnerable countries. He recalled that in preparation for the midterm review, UNCTAD together with ESCAP and ECE organized an Expert Group Meeting in Almaty in September and is also preparing to organize ambassadorial level retreats in Geneva and New York on preparations for the midterm review.

24. The Executive Secretary of UNECE, Ms. Olga Algayerova informed participants about UNECE’s initiatives to assist LLDCs in expediting the implementation of the VPoA. She pointed out that the TIR Convention and the Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, produced under the auspices of UNECE, are aimed at tackling inefficiencies at borders. She noted that the TIR in particular has contributed towards the attainment of Priority 1 of the VPoA, by reducing transit time and costs for trucks. She also encouraged LLDCs to join the electronic version of TIR (eTIR) for paperless transit and the Harmonization Convention which increases efficiencies and revenues by ensuring simple and speedy treatment of cargo at borders.

25. She underscored that, in support of VPoA’s Priority 2, UNECE has launched the United Nations Framework Classification of Resources (UNFC), which improves productivity and strengthens partnerships between countries, by enhancing the management of energy and mineral resources. UNECE has also assisted in developing transport infrastructure in Central Asia via the EuroAsian Transport Links project. She accentuated that UNECE has developed more than 480 recommendations, standards, and tools for trade facilitation, including the Single Window Recommendation for one-stop import-export, the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT) and the UN/LOCODE, the Global Location Codes. She further highlighted that UNECE carries out studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, in order to reduce bureaucracy and assist countries in using the standards and tools. Additionally, UNECE performs Innovation Performance Reviews to increase value-added and competitiveness.

26. Ms. Algayerova mentioned that UNECE’s agricultural standards increase the attractiveness of agricultural products to international trade. Additionally, UNECE, in collaboration with ESCAP, have helped establish national Single Windows and trade facilitation committees in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

D. General Debate

27. Ministers and high-level officials representing landlocked developing countries delivered statements during the interactive debate.

28. In his statement, H.E. Mr. Tsogtbaatar Damdin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia outlined some of Mongolia’s activities towards the implementation of the VPoA. He informed that Mongolia’s Sustainable Development Vision 2030, which was adopted in February 2016, focuses on building a multi-sector economy, a strong middle
class supported by democratic governance and a commitment to environmental protection. He noted that Mongolia is participating in various regional initiatives such as the “North East Asian Super Grid” project and has also recently concluded several agreements with its neighbours, including “The Agreement on access to and from the sea and transit transport through China’s territory by Mongolia” and the intergovernmental agreements on the terms for the rail freight transit transportation and on railway transit transportation. He noted that Mongolia has also agreed to establish the Mongolia-Russia-China economic corridor.

29. The Minister informed the participants of Mongolia’s travel facilitation initiative covering around 70 countries along the Belt and Road Initiative accounting for 65% of world’s population and 30% of its economic output, which entails: i) Fast-track lane for “Belt and Road” officials, scholars and investors at the Ulaanbaatar international airport and at the railway entry ports; ii) on-arrival visas to government delegates and business people with prior notification; iii) Multiple-entry visas to frequent business travelers with an expedited procedure at Mongolian diplomatic missions. He stressed that Mongolia’s experience with its neighbours may be useful for other LLDCs to learn from.

30. The Minister highlighted the full operationalization of the ITT for LLDCs and recalled the First meeting of the Board of Governors and the Inaugural Conference of the Think Tank co-organized by Government of Mongolia. He informed that Mongolia submitted a request on the inclusion of an additional item entitled “Observer status for the International Think Tank for LLDCs in the General Assembly” into the draft agenda of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly and called for support for the draft resolution. He also urged all LLDCs that have not yet ratified the Multilateral Agreement on the Establishment of the Think Tank to do so.

31. In his statement, H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, indicated that many of the issues faced by LLDCs were reflected in the historic Almaty Programme of Action (APoA), adopted in 2003 at the first Ministerial Conference of LLDCs and Transit Developing Countries and Development Partners. He pointed out that the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action laid foundation for the adoption, a decade later, of the Vienna Programme of Action and its priority areas. He noted that both documents help LLDCs to ensure connectivity, turning “landlockedness” into “landlinkedness”, while jointly pursuing specific goals such as enhancing infrastructure, boosting trade and transit, tackling challenges of climate change, and improving energy efficiency.

32. The Minister informed the meeting that the Astana Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on improving transport connectivity and trade facilitation held on 16-17 May 2018 helped to increase the visibility for the needs of LLDCs on the international stage and mobilized global support for in implementing the program. He also informed the meeting that in order to keep pace in tackling the issues faced by LLDCs Group, Kazakhstan was interested in serving in the Bureau of LLDC group for term 2020-2021. He informed the meeting that Astana was unanimously chosen as the venue for the World Trade Organization 12th Ministerial Conference in 2020.

33. Minister Abdrakhmanov highlighted that Kazakhstan’s strategic goal is to develop its transit and transportation potential and to connect to the intercontinental Eurasian transport system and today, several transcontinental corridors run through Kazakhstan.
He also noted that the construction of the Eurasian multimodal transit-transport hub - “Nurly Zhol” - will strengthen Kazakhstan’s Eurasian integration and connect with China’s Belt and Road Initiative. He indicated that Kazakhstan is implementing the Intelligent Transport System, based on the large-scale introduction of digital technologies for on-line tracking of movement of goods, providing unimpeded transit and simplified customs procedures. He noted that energy is an important area with potential to boost the development of LLDCs. He referred to the exhibition, “EXPO-2017, on the theme “Energy of the Future” that Kazakhstan hosted in Astana last year and noted that it promoted use of alternative “clean” energy and provided an impetus to develop a “green” economy in the country and other regions.

34. Minister Abdrakhmanov concluded by commending the Government of Mongolia for hosting the first ever International Think Tank for LLDCs. He stressed that to succeed, LLDCs must diversify their economies and ensure that the Vienna Program of Action and 2030 Agenda hand in hand with the New Agenda for Peace and the new reforms of the Secretary-General, so that LLDCs advance not only economically but tread the path of peace and stability.

35. H.E. Mr. Lesego Makgothi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lesotho remarked that despite being one of the most disadvantaged LLDCs, Lesotho has made notable strides in implementing the VPoA within its national and developmental frameworks. He drew attention to the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) II, a framework designed to implement Lesotho’s medium to long-term development goals in line with the VPoA. Its key priorities are: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Tourism, Creative arts, Technology and Innovation. He indicated that as a member of the South African Development Community (SADC), Lesotho is implementing the SADC Protocol on Trade which calls for nondiscriminatory treatment of transit goods. He stressed that Lesotho has implemented measures to improve freedom of transit and supports the strengthening of international transport corridors.

36. With respect to infrastructure development, Minister Makgothi underscored that project proposals aimed at developing the water, transport and health sectors were appraised by the Ministry of Planning to ensure that they are in line with NSDP. He however, stressed that the initiatives are supported by external funding from development partners and multilateral banks. He encouraged participants to learn from the lessons, gaps and experiences identified in the forthcoming mid-term review and informed that Lesotho will present its Voluntary National Report (VNR) at the upcoming High Level Political Forum in 2019.

37. H. E. Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao’s People Democratic Republic described the VPoA as an important cooperation framework and a mechanism to address challenges that stem from geographical handicaps and structural vulnerabilities. He underlined that, albeit racked with challenges, progress has been made to implement the VPoA and other international development initiatives in LLDCs. He urged the international community to increase support to LLDCs, as promised in the VPoA, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the SDGs and others. He was hopeful that the forthcoming midterm review will reflect the strong political will and commitment of the international community to implement the VPoA, so that it will stimulate the attainment of the SDGs.
38. He indicated that in pursuit of infrastructure development and regional integration, Laos has translated the VPoA into its national development plans and has increased investment in infrastructure development, particularly, roads and railways to link the country with the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, though the implementation of various bilateral and multilateral agreements. Mr. Kommasith concluded by expressing gratitude to the international community for contributing to the socio-economic development of Laos and urged the international community to support the VPoA.

39. Mr. Duali Mihyembo Louis Armand, Special Advisor to the Head of State for Burkina Faso highlighted that the implementation of the VPoA and 2030 Agenda were crucial for LLDCs in their quest for sustainable development and economic progress. In the same vein, he stressed that innovative solutions specific to LLDCs are important to achieve sustainable development. He commended the theme of the Meeting, which he highlighted as being vital to implementing the VPoA and 2030 Agenda. In line with this, he emphasized that it was important to combine efforts to address common challenges of the LLDCs.

40. He mentioned that Burkina Faso has undertaken major programs to promote trade and improve infrastructure such as roads, international airports and rail connectivity with its neighbours. He also lauded the inauguration of the ITT and commended Mongolia for its contribution. He urged all stakeholders, including the civil society and the private sector to contribute towards the achievement of the development agenda.

41. In his statement, H.E. Emmanuel Fabiano, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malawi affirmed Malawi’s commitment to the VPoA, the Urban Agenda and other like initiatives. He noted with concern, the devastating impact of climate change on vulnerable groups such as LLDCs and indicated that Malawi has collaborated with the National Habitat Community to establish initiatives aimed at assisting Malawi to achieve Goal 11 of the SDGs.

42. He acknowledged the prominent role of infrastructure, economic development and the eradication of poverty in the lives of Malawians. He recognized the special needs of LLDCs and the high costs of trade faced by the LLDCs compared with transit countries and requested for targeted assistance and support from the international community. He also stated that to achieve SDG 7, Malawi has created an enabling environment for private entities participation in the energy sector and called on investors to invest in Malawi’s energy sector.

43. H.E. Mr. Joseph Malanji, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zambia expressed his gratitude to the Republic of Paraguay for convening the Ministerial Meeting and he acknowledged the huge task ahead in particular embarking on the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action. He also applauded the Chair’s great commitment in the work of the Group of the LLDCs.

44. He emphasized that the theme of the meeting was timely and noted that the challenges of the LLDCs were unique and he emphasized that working together was vital for shaping the course of development of the LLDCs and transit partners. He emphasized that multilateral efforts, cooperation and increased finance focused on strategic regional tailored solutions and country specific programmes, were pertinent to shaping the course of development. He informed that to implement the VPoA, Zambia was investing
significantly in roads, rail, air transport, energy, water, sanitation and ICT infrastructure. He added that to strengthen regional cooperation, Zambia aimed to use its unique geographic position to be a transport hub and transit point within the sub-region and beyond. He informed that the “The Link Zambia 8000 Road Project” was a project that has transformed Zambia into a landlocked country connecting all districts to neighbouring countries. He remarked that Zambia has collaborated with Transit Countries and Development Partners to develop transport corridors such as the Nacala Road Corridor, Dar-es-salaam Road Corridor and the TAZARA Railway Corridor that links for Zambia to the Indian Ocean.

45. He highlighted that through its Smart Zambia initiative, Zambia intends to facilitate access to ICT and promote e-commerce. He also accentuated that Zambia has been successful in improving the ease of doing business and as a result, the time taken for name registration and company incorporation in Zambia has shortened from 21 days to 3 days. He pointed out that Zambia also promotes innovative financing such as Public Private Partnerships and has undertaken reforms to harmonize and simplify the tariff structure as well as remove quantitative restrictions on imports.

46. H.E. Mr. Malanji underscored that Zambia will continue to harness positive regional and global integration to manage economic and other international shocks. He called on the international community to address the declining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and declining merchandise trade for LLDCs, which he noted disappointedly accounts for less than 1% of world trade. He emphasized that the midterm review of the VPoA should serve as a springboard for regional integration and should also provide an opportunity for LLDCs to share good practices.

47. He emphasized that the midterm review of the VPoA should be an opportunity to revitalize the necessary partnerships that will champion the cause to realize the objectives and targets of the Vienna programme of Action. He noted that attaining the goals of the VPoA will contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He emphasized that the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” should be upheld by all partners to ensure that LLDCs are not left behind.

48. In her statement, H.E. María del Carmen Almendras, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, highlighted the role of the UN in the context of the Convention on the Law of the Sea. She stressed that the Ministerial Meeting enables LLDCs to share with international community their needs and to seek solutions that can help put the economies of LLDCs on equal footing with those countries that have access to the sea. She noted that notwithstanding the geographical circumstances that hinder LLDCs’ access to the sea, many LLDCs, but not all, have achieved major achievements in infrastructure development and access.

49. She highlighted that Bolivia was an independent country with its own access to the sea but is now temporarily deprived of its access to the sea following its conflict with Chile in the 1800s. She explained that the peace and friendship treaty between Chile and Bolivia in 1904 have not led to satisfactory implementation of access to the sea terms and for this reason Bolivia went to the International Court of Justice to oblige Chile to give Bolivia meaningful access to the sea. She informed that the case will be resolved on 1 October 2018.
50. She highlighted that Bolivia is facing increasingly higher fees for sea port services and processing of their cargo. She noted that the recent labour conflicts and strikes in Chile, including of customs officials, resulted in great economic harm to Bolivia. She informed that Bolivia has seen impacts mainly on road hauling, where cargo rates were passed on to the consumers including Bolivian truckers and shippers. She stressed that Bolivia believes in peaceful coexistence of states and warm brotherly relations, noting that sea and oceans are heritage of states, peoples and human kind.

51. In his remarks, H.E. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal affirmed Nepal’s support of the VPoA’s midterm review. He asserted that the infrastructure gap between LLDCs and transit neighbours, as well as low levels of trade competitiveness are core challenges faced by the LLDCs. He further stressed that predictable transit regime and investment in connectivity infrastructure is a *sine qua non* for the development of LLDCs. Mr Gyawali encouraged LLDCs to ensure that the VPoA is implemented in a full, timely and effective manner, in synergy with other developmental outcomes, including 2030 Agenda.

52. He delineated scaled up FDI and collaboration with transit countries, development partners and the private sector as enhancements to the much-needed capacity of LLDCs. He also underscored that international support measures such as technology transfer and investments, as well as LLDCs meaningful participation in global value chains and international trade are solutions to overcoming the disadvantage of landlockedness. He urged all stakeholders to support the International Think Tank for LLDCs. Minister Gyawali declared that Nepal has mainstreamed the VPoA and 2030 Agenda within its national plan and prioritizes infrastructure development and connectivity. He concluded by accentuating that implementing the VPoA and 2030 Agenda requires transformation of the status quo.

53. H.E. Professor Afework Kassu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, noted that while LLDCs have implemented policy measures that promote structural transformation and diversify economies, special trade and development-related challenges constrain endeavours to achieve the purposes of the VPoA. He stressed that global trade remains low, huge infrastructural gaps hinder regional integration and lack of adequate finance, technological and institutional capacities aggravate developmental challenges. He cited partnerships with development partners, coordinated and enhanced international support in manufacturing trade, effective and efficient infrastructure systems and facilitating the smooth and fast movement of goods and services, as prerequisites to meeting the objectives of the VPoA and integrating LLDCs into the global market.

54. He highlighted that Ethiopia has integrated the VPoA into its national development plan by undertaking policy measures aimed at improving manufacturing and enhancing connectivity and competitiveness. Accordingly, Ethiopia prioritizes achieving inclusive and sustainable industrialization and building resilient infrastructure. In this regard, Ethiopia’s government has succeeded in expanding road, railway, and air transport services and is working with neighbouring countries to establish and maintain effective transit systems. He also indicated that Ethiopia is focusing on labor intensive and light manufacturing sectors such as agro-processing, leather, textiles, diversifying sea outlets, simplifying access to land and eliminating challenges in trade logistics and custom service, to enhance global competitiveness and participation in the global value chain.
Minister Kassu concluded by expressing gratitude to Mongolia for hosting and supporting the ITT.

55. Ambassador Agnes A. Oswaha, Director of the International Organizations Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of South Sudan highlighted that South Sudan recognizes the challenges that LLDCs face. In this regard, she urged the group to remain united and cooperative to achieve common goals in trade and development. She underlined that South Sudan has stepped up efforts to develop infrastructure such as roads and bridges. She concluded by emphasizing the country’s support for the VPoA.

56. In his statement, H.E. Mr. Sem Kalla Ankourao, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Niger remarked that results attained under the VPoA are not meeting the expectations of some LLDCs. He asserted that Niger is at the forefront of activities to facilitate cooperation sub-regionally and regionally, as evidenced in its membership of several regional economic groupings aimed at implementing regional integration. He emphasized that to facilitate international trade, Niger has initiated reforms to simplify formalities and procedures, reduce delays and abnormal practices in the marketing and exports of agro-pastoral products. To increase trade and attract foreign investors, Niger has launched reforms to improve the public-private partnership system and has organized forums to demonstrate to foreign investors the opportunities Niger offers. In the same vein, Niger has revised its investment code and oil code to facilitate private investment and has adopted an Action Plan to improve the ease of doing business.

57. Minister Ankourao described the Common External Tariff (CET) of the West African Economic Union as a major opportunity to promote tariff disarmament and to facilitate the free movement of goods and persons. He urged development partners to honor commitments under 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. He concluded by calling on development banks to ease the conditionality of access to loans to LLDCs and underlined that Niger has ratified the Multilateral Agreement Establishing an International Think Tank on Landlocked Developing Countries.

58. H.E. Mr. Sonam Tshong, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bhutan shared that Bhutan has made successful economic progress through the implementation of the VPoA. He highlighted that despite significant improvements in the GDP/GNI per capita and other macro-economic and social indicators, Bhutan’s growth rates have been characterized as volatile and uneven and could threaten the disruption of development achievements. The Minister acknowledged that the effort to advance development must begin at home and Bhutan is committed to finding innovative ways and means to mobilize domestic resources.

59. He also underscored the importance of global partnerships and collaboration between transit countries and development partners to effectively address the challenges of LLDCs. He shared that uninterrupted and predictable development assistance is vital to build and sustain infrastructure development in LLDCs and good infrastructure will ensure better connectivity and contribute toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Minister called for adequate and sustained means of implementation for the Vienna Programme of Action, including through strengthened regional and international partnerships on South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
60. The Minister expressed the Royal Government of Bhutan’s appreciation to the USG and the Office of the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS for its continued efforts in bringing to the forefront the development challenges of LLDCs.

61. **H.E. Patrick Mugoya, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uganda** noted that the theme for the meeting was pertinent because a global partnership as stated in Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda remained critical for supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Vienna Programme of Action. H.E. Mugoya urged LLDCs to prioritize partnerships to enhance infrastructure development and maintenance, trade facilitation, regional integration and structural economic transformation. He remarked that in pursuit of economic transformation, Uganda is prioritizing the implementation of the Northern Corridor Integration Projects, centered on infrastructure development, energy generation, transmission and interconnectivity; information telecommunications technology; single customs territory and airspace management.

62. Notable infrastructure developments include the construction of the Mombasa - Nairobi section in the Northern Corridor and the planning of the Standard Gauge Railways. H.E. Mugoya stressed that these projects intend to facilitate and increase trade and investment, reduce the transit time for exports and imports, reduce cost of doing business, boost industrialization and create employment opportunities. He reiterated the importance of global partnerships to the implementation of the VPoA and 2030 Agenda, and declared that Uganda is leveraging support from the private sector. H.E. Mugoya emphasized that the United Nations system organizations have an important role to play in the development of the LLDCs and he called on their continued support.

63. **Mrs. Kumbirayi Taremba, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations** noted that although the LLDCs have made some progress in implementing the VPoA, they remain fragile and vulnerable to external shocks, not only because of their high transport and transit costs, but also due to their lack of economic diversification, limited productive capacities and low export competitiveness. She stressed that partnerships with neighbouring transit countries should be enhanced with a view to establish mechanisms aimed at reducing inland transportation costs. She also indicated that partnerships were important for infrastructure development and maintenance, development of climate resilient infrastructure, and to upscale productive capacities, access to technologies and technical expertise.

64. The Deputy Permanent Representative encouraged the LLDCs to continue to strive to strengthen domestic resource mobilization mechanisms and efforts to combat illegal movements of money or capital from the LLDCs. The fight against illicit financial flows should be at the forefront of the international efforts related to development financing. She encouraged LLDCs to fight corruption within their countries and to come up with corruption intolerant systems to ensure efficient mobilization of adequate domestic resources.

65. She indicated that Zimbabwe is taking steps to realize its new goal of being a middle-income country by the year 2030. She indicated that her country is exercising financial discipline in the implementation of radical economic reforms targeted at attracting and facilitating foreign and domestic investments in line with the reality that “Zimbabwe is
open for business”. She also indicated that the Government has embarked on a deliberate path to create a conducive investment environment, correct fiscal policies, re-stabilize the monetary system, and resolve arrears to international lenders that would allow for a resumption of development financing.

66. In his remarks, H.E. Mr. Mahmadamin Mahmadaminov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations commended the Chair and High Representative for reaffirming and defending the needs of LLDCs at meetings such as the Forum on Financing for Development, Repositioning of the United Nations Development System and the 2018 High Level Political Forum. He asserted that Tajikistan has undertaken measures, in line with the VPoA, to develop transit, transport and communications infrastructure. Furthermore, the country has prioritized the improvement of transport and energy infrastructure in order to expand sub-regional and regional trade. He emphasized that Tajikistan is working on initiating a Single window to simplify customs regulations and has four active economic zones to enhance regional trade, integration and cooperation.

67. With respect to the energy sector, he underlined that the country’s energy infrastructure is being developed in line with an integrated development plan centered on renewable sources. Notable developments in this sector include the planning of CASA-1000, an energy bridge between Central Asia and South Asia, intended to export electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to the energy markets of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mr. Mahmadaminov was hopeful that CASA-1000 will increase industrial production and trade in both regions.

68. He urged LLDCs to collectively address water-related challenges which are prevalent in all LLDCs and exacerbated by the effects of climate change. He recalled that milestone events, such as the United Nations and Tajikistan High-Level International Conference on the Water Decade in Dushanbe, which contributed towards SDG 6 and other water-related goals of the 2030 Agenda. In the same vein, he encouraged the international community to support Tajikistan’s draft resolution, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028 during the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

69. Mr. Fernando Cabezas, Head of the United Nations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile welcomed the opportunity to discuss matters of common interests to LLDCs and transit countries. He stressed that Chile supports 2030 Agenda and the VPoA, which addresses the needs of LLDCs. He also indicated that Chile will follow the recommendations in the VPoA and have already met some of the requirements. He highlighted that the spirit of cooperation with Latin American LLDCs has enabled Chile to be a port of transit for the LLDCs. He concluded by declaring Chile’s commitment to building stronger partnerships in order to achieve 2030 Agenda.

Due to the time constraint, Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt, Executive Director of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries was not able to deliver his remarks but he shared his written remarks. In his remarks he highlighted the significance of the meeting, pointing out that it is the first time the ITT has participated in the Annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers of LLDCs as a full-fledged international intergovernmental organization. He commended the twelve LLDCs that have ratified the
Multilateral Agreement for the establishment of the ITT and urged the remaining LLDCs to do so.

70. Mr. Erdenetsogt also indicated that after the entry into force of the Multilateral Agreement, a Board of Governors was established, consisting of representatives from countries that ratified the Agreement. He also stated that in cooperation with the Government of Mongolia and OHRLLS, the ITT organized an intergovernmental inaugural meeting of the ITT which served as a platform for discussing issues relevant to LLDCs. He highlighted that the meeting adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration which intends to bolster the work of the ITT. He also stressed that ITT is working towards putting itself on a sound financial footing, enlarging membership, enhancing cooperation with other entities and providing quality recommendations for LLDCs. He shared information on planned projects and meetings of ITT and he called for support and stressed that the outcome of the meetings will serve as useful inputs for the forthcoming mid-term review of the VPoA.

E. Update on the Preparations for the Midterm Review of the Vienna Program of Action

71. In her statement that was also not read but shared with the meeting due to time constraint, Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu highlighted that the purpose of the midterm review (MTR) was to assess progress, identify achievements and constraints and propose recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and the SDGs. She indicated that the midterm review will adopt an inter-governmentally negotiated political declaration and she stressed the importance of strong and inclusive participation. She emphasized that the MTR will foster the participation of all stakeholders, including transit and donor countries, private sector, UN system organizations and others.

72. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu highlighted that the Astana Declaration, an outcome of the Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Transport that was held in Astana, Kazakhstan in May 2018, was an important part of the preparatory process of the MTR. She also informed that the outcome of the inaugural meeting of the ITT, which discussed foreign direct investment, economic diversification, ICT connectivity, infrastructure development, transit corridors and trade facilitation in LLDCs was also input to the MTR.

73. She commended LLDCs that had submitted their national reports on the implementation of the VPoA and urged those that had not submitted to do so. She informed that OHRLLS is working with UNESCAP, UNECE, UNECA, ECLAC amongst other organizations to organize regional reviews meetings which are planned to be held in the first half of 2019. She also informed that OHRLLS would partner with other entities to organize pre-conference thematic events on international trade, transport corridors, ICT connectivity and structural economic transformation. She also informed that OHRLLS would undertake background analytical work in collaboration with the Regional Commissions and that inter-agency consultative group meetings would continue to be organized to better coordinate the MTR with the stakeholders.

74. She also informed that OHRLLS will continue to make efforts to mobilize resources for MTR. She informed the Meeting that contributions were received from the Governments of the People's Republic of China, Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and
Austria. She concluded by pledging OHRLLS’ support to the LLDCs for the successful MTR of the VPoA.

F. Consideration and Adoption of the Draft Ministerial Declaration by LLDCs

75. Ambassador Julio César Arriola Ramírez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay stood in for H.E. Mr. Luis Alberto Castiglioni. He invited the members of the Group of the LLDCs to adopt the Draft Ministerial Declaration. There were no objections and the meeting adopted the Ministerial Declaration attached as Annex 1.

G. Any Other Matter, Conclusion of the Meeting

76. No issues were raised under this agenda item.

77. Ambassador Julio César Arriola Ramírez thanked everyone for the full participation in the meeting and adjourned the meeting.
Annex 1

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries

New York, 28 September 2018

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), have met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, on 28 September 2018, on the occasion of the 73rd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and have held our deliberations under the theme "Revitalizing partnerships to enhance the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development",

Recognizing that the lack of territorial access to the sea, aggravated by remoteness from world markets and high transit costs and risks, continue to impose serious constraints on export earnings, private capital inflow and domestic resource mobilization and therefore adversely affects the overall sustainable development of LLDCs,

Recalling the Vienna Programme of Action is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its full implementation is fundamental to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by LLDCs and ensuring that no one is left behind, further reiterate that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, are universal, indivisible and interlinked,

Welcoming the UN General Assembly resolution 72/232 that calls for convening of a Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action no later than December 2019,

Welcoming the following; the outcome of the 2018 Follow-up and review of the Financing for Development; the Ministerial Declaration of the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; the Ministerial declaration adopted at the Ministerial Meeting of the LLDCs held during the Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference; the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport held in Astana, Kazakhstan; as well as the Ulaanbaatar Declaration adopted at the Inaugural Conference of the International Think Tank for LLDCs held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Declare as follows;

1. Take note of the Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024;

2. Stress the importance of fostering strong synergy and coherence at all levels in the implementation, follow-up, and review of the Vienna Programme of Action with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other
development processes including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Nairobi Maafikiano;

3. Take note of the progress that LLDCs have made on the SDGs and express concern that LLDCs as a group are still faced with developmental challenges that limit the progress as reflected by the declining annual growth rate of real GDP. We stress that priority attention and support should be given to LLDCs in the implementation of the SDGs and in follow up processes;

4. Call upon all LLDCs, transit developing countries, development partners, United Nations System, the private sector and other stakeholders to further strengthen their efforts to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in LLDCs. We stress that collective action can promote policy integration, facilitate inclusive partnerships and provide support for achieving sustainable development and inclusive growth;

5. Re-affirms the importance of strengthening Resident Coordinators in the context of United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform and stress that the UNDS should accord high priority to the economic sectors and productive capacity building in LLDCs and should enhance support to LLDCs in their efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and their development objectives;

6. Underscore that the critical role of Resident Coordinators in ensuring that the goals and priorities set out in the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs and the SDGs are mainstreamed into national development plans and strategies in LLDCs and transit countries;

7. Underscore the principle of national ownership and we continue to make concerted efforts to mobilize additional domestic public resources but large gaps in resource mobilization remains. We call on the development partners to enhance official development assistance to LLDCs in predictable, reliable and sustainable manner. We welcome the contribution of the South-South Cooperation to the development of LLDCs and stress that South-South Cooperation is a complement to, and not a substitute for, North-South cooperation;

8. Recognize the crucial role of deeper regional integration in the development of LLDCs by improving transit transport connectivity and ensuring greater intraregional trade, common regulatory policies, border agency cooperation and harmonized customs procedures to expand regional markets;

9. Stress that investment into quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, connectivity, transportation, water and sanitation, as well as ICTs are important for LLDCs to improve their competitiveness and fully integrate into the global economy, however the magnitude of resources required is beyond the capacity of LLDCs. We therefore call upon bilateral and multilateral development partners to provide enhanced assistance towards the development and maintenance of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in LLDCs. We also call for support to the LLDCs and transit countries in developing bankable implementable infrastructure projects that are financially viable, environmentally friendly and accepted by the local communities;
10. **Note with concern** that more than 48% of LLDCs’ population currently live without electricity. We will strive to achieve policies, regulatory and institutional frameworks that promote sustainable energy transition. We call for innovative partnerships between development partners, UN system and other international and regional organisations to support accelerated universal access, renewable energy and energy efficiency development;

11. **Concerned** that LLDCs’ share of global merchandise trade remains below one per cent of the global levels. We reaffirm our commitment to continue to intensify our efforts to build productive capacities, pursue structural economic transformation, industrialization, value addition and encourage export diversification;

12. **Call upon** development partners to provide stronger support to LLDCs to build their trade and supply-side capacity including through enhancing Aid for Trade. We further call on the UN system and other international and regional organisations to enhance support to LLDCs to build their productive capacity;

13. **Underline** the need to ensure that LLDCs’ interests are given due consideration in the WTO to facilitate the integration of LLDCs into the global trade and welcome initiatives which will support greater and more effective participation of LLDCs in international trade;

14. **Note with concern** the increase in the adoption of protectionist measures by major trading partners. This situation can further marginalize LLDCs from global trade. We call on the WTO Members to preserve the multilateral trade system and resist all forms of protectionism to promote common prosperity;

15. **Encourage** LLDCs and transit countries that have not yet ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and have not yet notified their category C measures and their capacity needs to do so and take advantage of the technical assistance opportunities. We also call on the development partners, the private sector and UN system and other international and regional organizations to enhance support to LLDCs and transit countries to facilitate the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement;

16. **Welcome** capacity building activities organized by WTO, UN-OHRLLS, UNCTAD, WCO, World Bank and other partners provided to LLDCs and transit countries to facilitate rapid and effective implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, including the workshop on Transit to be held in Geneva in October 2018 in the margins of the Trade Facilitation Committee and the planned regional workshops on enhancing border cooperation. We encourage the WTO and partners to ensure wider participation of LLDCs and transit countries. We also call on the WTO and other relevant international and regional organizations to enhance assistance to LLDCs in the areas identified as requiring assistance in their notifications in particular, in the areas of institutional procedures, legislative and regulatory framework, ICT and needs assessment;

17. **Underscore** the significance of international transport corridors for reducing trade costs and promoting regional sustainable development, and request for strengthening of
the role of economic corridors, corridor management organizations, sub-regional and inter-regional arrangements;

18. Encourage LLDCs to continue to build conducive business environment for private sector development. We call on development partners and international organizations to provide assistance to LLDCs to further strengthen their business environment and build the capacity of the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises to participate in international trade;

19. Commit to continue promoting conducive policies to attract foreign direct investment that leads to promote trade as well as sustainable development of LLDCs. We call on development partners to provide greater support to the foreign direct investment-seeking efforts of LLDCs. We also call on the UNCTAD, UN-OHRLLS, UNIDO, United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, and other international and regional organisations to provide capacity building support to LLDCs to develop more focused policies, strategies and mechanisms;

20. Recognize that the growth in e-commerce provides international trade opportunities including new market opportunities for LLDCs. We call on UN-OHRLLS, UNCTAD and partners to undertake studies on how to promote e-commerce in LLDCs;

21. Recognize also that integration of LLDCs into the global and regional value chains can facilitate export diversification and industrial development. We call on WTO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, Common Fund for Commodities, World Bank, UNDP, ITC, UN-OHRLLS, regional economic commissions, and development partners, to provide assistance to LLDCs to strengthen their capacity to participate in regional and global value chains;

22. Further recognize that an efficient and productive services sector will contribute significantly to productivity growth and the overall competitiveness of LLDCs’ economies. In that regard, we affirm our commitment to build regulatory and institutional frameworks to strengthen our services sector and we call on international organizations to support LLDCs to develop their services sectors;

23. Concerned that LLDCs are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, desertification, land degradation, drought, floods, including glacial lakes outburst floods and other natural disasters due to their location, level of development, and greater reliance on climate sensitive sectors like agriculture. We stress the importance of continued support from international cooperation on adaptation and mitigation efforts and on strengthening resilience. We further stress the necessity of adequate and predictable financial resources from a variety of sources, including public and private ones, and stress that LLDCs should be accorded greater access to the UN Green Climate Fund and technical assistance to have beneficial access to the Fund;

24. Recognize LLDCs’ efforts to promote building of resilient societies through Disaster Risk Reduction. We welcome the key outcomes of the Central Asia and South Caucasus Sub Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in June 2018 in Armenia and the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction held in July 2018 in Mongolia;

25. Recognize that large data gaps persist in the LLDCs, particularly as concerns
disaggregated data, and that significant efforts are required to strengthen national statistical systems. We call on increased support of all types and from all sources, including capacity-building and technical support to LLDCs, to strengthen their national statistical systems;

26. **Look** forward to the convening of the 2019 High Level Political Forum under the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. We stress that the outcome of the Forum should take into account LLDCs issues;

27. **Recognize** the significant potential of multilateral development banks and other international development banks in financing sustainable development and providing know-how to the LLDCs and call on them to enhance their support especially towards infrastructure development;

28. **Welcome** the inauguration of the International Think Tank for LLDCs on 11 June 2018 and we encourage the International Think Tank for LLDCs to undertake research and capacity development for the LLDCs and to strengthen research collaboration with relevant international organizations including UN-OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNDP, WTO and others, and with research institutions, think tanks, and other stakeholders on all the 6 priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action and foster coherence in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action with the Sustainable Development Goals;

29. **Call upon** the Member States, United Nations system organizations and other stakeholders to provide voluntary contributions to the International Think Tank;

30. **Urge** all LLDCs that have not yet ratified the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for LLDCs to do so;

31. **Underscore** the importance of concluding modalities resolution for the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action as soon as possible;

32. **Underscore** that the midterm review should be preceded by thematic and pre-conference events that are in line with the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action and recent developments relevant to the LLDCs development agenda;

33. **Stress** that UN-OHRLLS, as the focal point, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution, should undertake the necessary preparations, mobilise and coordinate the active involvement of the United Nations system organizations to ensure inclusive participation;

34. **Emphasize** that the outcome of the midterm review should be ambitious, action oriented, and concise and make renewed efforts to accelerate the implementation of Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including eradication of poverty in LLDCs to ensure that no one is left behind;

35. **Welcome** with deep appreciation the generous contributions toward the convening of the midterm review received from the Governments of the People's Republic of China, Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Austria;
36. **Encourage** active participation at a high level of all States Members of the United Nations, in particular landlocked and transit developing countries and donor countries, as well as of the United Nations system and international and regional organizations and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector in the midterm review;

37. **Note** the ongoing national and regional-level preparations that will make important contributions to the Midterm Review and call upon the Regional Commissions for their support in the organization of the regional review meetings;

38. **Encourage** Member States to conclude, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the negotiations on the draft outcome document in advance of the Midterm Review;

39. **Request** the Secretary-General of the United Nations to undertake all necessary measures to provide necessary resources to carry out the tasks related to the preparation of the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action;

40. **Invite** development partners and the international financial and development institutions to make voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund established by the Secretary-General to support the activities related to the follow-up and the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, including for the purpose of assisting LLDCs in participating fully and effectively in the Midterm Review and the preparatory process;

41. **Appreciate** the important role played by UN-OHRLLS in coordination and follow-up on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, including coordination of the preparatory process for the midterm review;

42. **Express** our sincere recognition to the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, for the efforts undertaken in coordinating the Group’s activities in its capacity as the Chair of the Group of LLDCs.

*New York, 28th September 2018*
Annex 2

Group of Landlocked Developing Countries: composition by region (as of September 2018)

Africa

1. Botswana
2. Burkina Faso
3. Burundi
4. Central African Republic
5. Chad
6. Ethiopia
7. Lesotho
8. Malawi
9. Mali
10. Niger
11. Rwanda
12. Swaziland
13. South Sudan
14. Uganda
15. Zambia
16. Zimbabwe

Asia

17. Afghanistan
18. Bhutan
19. Kazakhstan
20. Kyrgyzstan
21. Lao People’s Democratic Republic
22. Mongolia
23. Nepal
24. Tajikistan
25. Turkmenistan
26. Uzbekistan

Eastern Europe

27. Armenia
28. Azerbaijan
29. Republic of Moldova
30. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Latin America

31. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
32. Paraguay
Annex 3

List of Participants

1. Armenia
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29. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
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30. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Mr. Achim Steiner

31. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
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32. The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)
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