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Statement

by

Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg
Chief, Policy Development, Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS

at the Strengthening ICT Connectivity and Digital Inclusion of LLDCs

Thematic Event at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum

Monday, 16:30 – 18:15,
8 April 2019
Conference Room H2, ITU Headquarters, Geneva
• Mr. Cosmas Zavazava, representative of the ITU  
• Excellencies,  
• Distinguished participants,  
• Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon and a warm welcome to you all. I would like to express my gratitude to the ITU for partnering with us in organizing this important event focused on ICT connectivity of the landlocked developing countries.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is built on the promise to leave no one behind. This principle is particularly important LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. It is this context, it would like to extend my appreciation to the ITU colleagues for hosting this thematic event for LLDCs in the margin of the World Summit on the Information society.

As you know, the 32 landlocked developing countries are disadvantaged in their development process because of their high trade transactions costs and unpredictable and inadequate transit systems that erode their external trade competitiveness. This hampers their integration into world markets and their ability to benefit from regional and global value chains. In 2014 United Nations adopted Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2014, is an ambitious programme with time bound specific objectives in six priorities including transit policy issues; infrastructure development; international trade; regional integration and structural economic transformation. The General Assembly will hold the Midterm review of this programme later this year in New York.

LLDCs continue to face structural challenges such as limited productive capacities, lack of value addition and diversification and heavy reliance on primary commodities. OHRLLS estimates indicate that because of landlocked, the level of development of these countries is on average about 20% lower compared to a typical coastal country.

ICT can assist the LLDCs improve the efficiency and competitiveness and to exploit economies of scale and network effects, to raise labour and capital productivity, and to access global value chains. ICT make it easier for businesses or consumers to connect with potential trade partners; and goods and services of LLDCs can increasingly be marketed through global and regional digital platforms.

The digitalization of logistics services and regulatory border controls increases the efficiency and the ease of doing trade. Technologies like
computerised facilitation systems, automated single windows, cargo tracking and e-payments would reduce the costs and time at border crossings.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

According to ITU data, the LLDCs have made tangible progress in ICT connectivity since the adoption of the VPoA. Mobile telephony subscription rates per 100 inhabitants increased from 83 in 2014 to almost 90 in 2017. With regard to internet use, the LLDCs have experienced an increase of 34% in internet users between 2014 and 2017. The LLDCs also experienced a growth in fixed broadband subscriptions. But LLDCs are still far behind compared to developed and other developing countries. There is also a digital divide amongst the LLDCs themselves with some countries performing better than others.

LLDCs face challenges that prevent them from fully harnessing the developmental potential of ICT and digitalization. These include infrastructural gaps, relatively high cost of ICT services, in particular broadband services, low digital literacy rates, poor quality regulation and the high cost of accessing submarine cables. The development of Fixed-broadband is particularly difficult for LLDCs because of its high prices.

Recently we organized regional review meetings in Euro-Asia and Africa as part of the preparatory process to the MTR. We will held Latin American meeting in June in Asunción. Outcome documents of the regional review meetings included important recommendations in relation to the ICT development. Let me mention just few of them here.

1. LLDCs are encouraged to create appropriate enabling environment including the necessary policies, legal and regulatory framework to support ICT development. In particular, the reduction of costs of broadband access, digital skills, increased adoption and utilization of ICT applications and services are strongly recommended.

2. LLDCs are encouraged to provide for mechanisms to facilitate the deployment of networks and services in non-profitable area, including rural areas through public investment, public private partnerships, or other incentives.

3. The international community should provide financial and technical assistance to support accelerated ICT development in LLDCs. In this
regard all key partners including development partners, the United Nations system, and other international organizations, the Regional Development Banks, and Regional Economic Communities are encouraged to strengthen their support.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In closing, I wish that today you will have inspiring discussions, share practical experiences, identify what worked well, what did not and suggest recommendations to accelerate ICT connectivity of LLDCs.

For my part, I would like to assure you that OHRLLS will carefully listen your deliberations and will bring to the attention of the intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document of the MTR. The President of the General Assembly attaches high priority to this process.

I thank you for your kind attention.