



Opening statement by

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

**Opening Session
Ambassadorial Retreat on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review
on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Decade
2014–2024**

**HNA Palisades Premier Conference Center, Palisades, New York
7-8 May 2019**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends

A very warm welcome to you all !

What a privilege to have you , Excellency Ms. Inga Rhonda King, with us !
Thank you.

We also benefitted last night from the remarks sent by Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa, the President of the General Assembly.

I am pleased that the Chair of the LLDC Group as well as the co-facilitators for the intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document for the midterm review can be with us today. Thank you !

Last but certainly not least, I must thank the Government of the Russian Federation for your generous support which has made this retreat possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Vienna Programme of Action was adopted almost 5 years ago. It had and has a straightforward goal: a comprehensive development framework to address the challenges of the landlocked developing countries.

There is no doubt that we now have greater awareness of the LLDC issues. There is increased visibility and also the recognition that LLDCs have special needs at the international level and in the work of the United Nations.

We also see have increased reference to the LLDCs in key United Nations Development Frameworks adopted after the Vienna Programme such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework.

Initiatives in support of the LLDCs such as the Sustainable Mobility for All and the inauguration of the International Think Tank on LLDCs have also been taken.

Now, the global community's 2030 Agenda has a key ambition and that is to leave no one behind. Quite obviously, this must include LLDCs !

Therefore, it is a MUST for us to work on effective linkages between the follow-up and review arrangements of the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme.

Two fora can play a key in this and these are the HLPF and the financing for development forum. Both are fora where the LLDCs could bring forward their special needs and push for strengthened coherence.

My plea is that adequate time is devoted to the special needs and challenges of the LLDCs in these follow-up processes, and in particular in the HLPF.

The LLDC Group continues to demonstrate their strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda. This is very important and 6 LLDCs conducted Voluntary National Reviews of implementation in 2018. It is encouraging that this year, 10 additional LLDCs have committed to presenting their Voluntary National Reviews during the HLPF in July.

From a macro-perspective, SDG implementation by the LLDCs shows some progress. And as always, there is a BUT. It is clear that considerable additional efforts and resources will be required to achieve targets by 2030 to ensure the LLDCs are not left behind.

Encouraging progress can be recorded in the critical health-related SDGs and for indicators related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Access to electricity increased. Access to education is being enhanced.

Poverty levels in LLDCs have declined.

And again we have a BUT - poverty levels remain higher than world average.

Moderate or severe food insecurity is prevalent. Access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities remains low, well below world averages, despite steady improvements.

The high vulnerability of LLDCs to the too often devastating impacts of climate change, especially drought, desertification, melting of mountain glaciers, and land degradation, is of serious concern from both a developmental and a security perspective.

In short, too many LLDCs remain at the bottom of the development ladder .

My message is simple: more efforts, more and faster action are needed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said before, the Vienna Programme and Agenda 2030 are let me say twins - achieving the SDGs , ensuring that we leave no one behind implies that we must ensure that the Vienna Programme of Action is fully implemented !

The glass is half full and let us now partner, work harder, work smarter to fill it up!

Let me acknowledge some of the achievements first.

Most LLDCs have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement which is at the core of making cross-border trade cheaper, faster and more efficient.

LLDCs have become more active participants in regional integration and cooperation efforts.

Efforts have been ongoing to enhance transport, energy and ICT connectivity.

Those are evidence of progress, signs of hope and we need to maintain this momentum and enhance these positive trends.

at the same time it is now that we must address major challenges and outstanding issues in the implementation of the Vienna Programme.

LLDCs remain marginalized in global trade. Their exports remain undiversified. The issue of the high trade costs for the LLDCs has hardly improved. Progress on structural economic transformation is slow.

We really must leverage the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action to address in tangible ways these issues.

The review is indeed our, YOUR opportunity to comprehensively assess progress, identify achievements, obstacles, constraints and propose ways forward.

We must look at actions that worked, actions that did not work and initiatives needed to close gaps and accelerate implementation of the Programme.

My Office was mandated to co-ordinate the Midterm Review. The national, regional and global preparations are continuing.

At the global level, 3 meetings of the inter-agency consultative group have been held that discussed the preparations for the review.

14 pre-conference events have also already been organized by OHRLLS and other agencies that are members of the inter-agency consultative group.

The issues addressed spanned from transit, to transport, trade and border cooperation to energy, ICT, foreign direct investment, productive capacity building, structural economic transformation and science, technology and innovation. Several more events are still being planned for the remainder of the year.

The Euro-Asia regional meeting successfully took place on 11 and 12 February 2019 at ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok.

The Africa regional review meeting was held on 18 and 19 March 2019 in Marrakesh.

Both meetings adopted outcome documents that present an assessment of the implementation of the Vienna Programme in the regions and provide valuable proposals for the next five years.

The Latin America regional meeting will be held at the ECLAC Headquarters in Santiago on 11 and 12 June.

in terms of the national level preparations, we have received national reports on the implementation of the VPoA from 20 LLDCs.

This is a major and very participatory process which already has and will continue to provide for crucial inputs to feed into the outcome document of the midterm review.

The upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the 74th session General Assembly that my Office is currently preparing will be another important input.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

friends

I very much look forward to our open dialogue today.

I very much hope we can identify concrete recommendations to feed into the outcome document of the midterm review.

Let us never forget that behind it all, this is about the daily lives and futures of women and men and boys and girls !

As I said last night - and I think it is worth repeating - the full implementation of the Vienna Programme is about bringing impact, tangible benefits for the more than 500 million people in the LLDCs.

Now is the opportunity to come up with concrete, targeted initiatives and actions in order to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the next five years.

Now is the time for all of us to rally, to partner for this purpose. The importance of strengthened partnerships and collaboration cannot be overstated.

The entire UN Development system stands ready to support !

We know too well that the LLDCs are at the core of making the 2030 Agenda reality.

The LLDCs are amongst the as we say " key beneficiaries " of UN Development System support and we hope reform.

Stronger, highly experienced UN country presence is vitally important for them. It is important that the UN system continues to accord special priority to the economic sectors and to productive capacity building in the LLDCs.

It is critical that we continue to support the LLDCs to ensure your continued full engagement in the reform processes and to ensure that LLDCs truly benefit from these efforts.

Thank you.