REMARKS BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,
MARÍA FERNANDA ESPINOSA GARCÉS

AMBASSADORIAL RETREAT ON THE
COMPREHENSIVE HIGH-LEVEL MIDTERM REVIEW ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA PROGRAMME
OF ACTION FOR THE DECADE 2014-2024

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

Delivered by Toni-Shae Freckleton, Senior Adviser and
Team Leader for Sustainable Development
Your Excellency, Inga Rhonda King, President of the UN
Economic and Social Council,

Your Excellency, Doma Tshering, Permanent
Representative of Bhutan – co-facilitator of the Vienna
Programme of Action mid-term review,

Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-
General and High Representative for the Least Developed
Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small
Island Developing States,

Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Administrator, Director
of the Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
Over half of the 32 Landlocked Developing Countries are categorized as “least developed”. Meanwhile, of all Least Developed Countries, more than a third are landlocked. Less than a third of people in LLDCs have access to basic sanitation services and safely managed drinking water. On the other hand, these countries have huge potential to contribute to global green growth and innovative development practices. So supporting LLDCs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is essential – to fulfilling our promise to leave no one behind, and to realizing the 2030 Agenda as whole.

I am therefore extremely sorry not to be able to join you in person for this retreat. But I assure you: I am wholly convinced of the importance of the Vienna Programme of Action, and 100% committed to supporting preparations for the General Assembly’s Midterm Review later this year.
Excellencies,

The Vienna Programme of Action offers a framework to address the specific challenges faced by LLDCs – due to their remoteness from world markets, lack of territorial access to the sea, and high transport and transit costs. For instance, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, LLDCs spend nearly two times more of their export earnings on transport and insurance services than developing countries.

As we approach the mid-way point of the Vienna Programme, we should reflect on the progress achieved to date: such as ratification by 24 LLDCs of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, LLDCs’ entry into sub-
regional and bilateral agreements, and advances in transport, energy and ICT infrastructure development.

However, it is clear that Member States will need to ensure that the Midterm Review significantly strengthens and refines existing initiatives, and expands and enhances partnerships with stakeholders – international, regional, national and local.

We must find ways to maintain progress in high-skill and technology-intensive exports – particularly in the context of the decline in LLDCs’ overall share in global merchandise exports.

We must continue to increase regional and bilateral cooperation with neighboring states in areas such as tourism and transit arrangements. And we must intensify our efforts to close the “infrastructure gap” in LLDCs.
Excellencies,

The Vienna Programme of Action is **integral** to our ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda, from SDG 1 on ending poverty in all its forms, to SDG 17 on revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. As such, we should ensure that **every** key meeting – the High-Level Political Forum in July, all the meetings during High-Level Week in September – is used an opportunity to make progress on the VPoA.

At a time when the value of multilateralism and multilateral institutions is being questioned, the best way to demonstrate the benefits of global cooperation is for us to **deliver** on our commitment to leave no one behind.
I wish you a fruitful retreat and look forward to being briefed on your discussions. Thank you.