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Opening Statement by

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

at the Annual Ministerial Meeting
of the Group of LLDCs

25 September 2019

New York
H.E. Antonio Rivas Palacios Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay and the Chair of the Group of LLDCs,
H.E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to attend this meeting on behalf of Secretary-General António Guterres who would have wanted to be here but, due to conflicting engagements, could not attend this meeting. I bring best wishes from him.

Let me first express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Antonio Rivas Palacios for Paraguay’s excellent leadership to the LLDCs Group. I also wish to express my gratitude for the leadership that Ambassador Julio César Arriola Ramírez continues to exercise here in New York.

This year marks the midpoint of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the theme for this meeting is indeed appropriate, as we gear up for the Comprehensive High-level Midterm review scheduled for 5 and 6 December 2019 here in New York. This week is also very important in view of the other ongoing processes that are fundamental to the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action. As you may be aware, the General Assembly is meeting to follow up and comprehensively review progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the High-level dialogue on Financing for Development, the Climate Action Summit and High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage are also convened this week. The outcomes of these meetings are very important as we will beginning the second half of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The General Assembly is also conducting the mid-term review of the programme of action for the small island developing states. Your participation to this review will be an expression of solidarity with a group of countries, which just like LLDCs, is facing binding structural challenges in the pursuit of their sustainable development agenda.

Excellency,
Allow me to apprise you on the state of socioeconomic development in LLDCs as well as the progress achieved so far on the implementation of the Vienna Programme since its adoption in 2014.

LLDCs have exhibited some progress toward achievement of the SDG targets but the progress remains slow and not enough to achieve the SDGs by 2030. LLDCs, in too many instances, continue to lag behind the averages of developing countries as well as global averages.

Growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) for LLDCs declined, from 5.6 per cent in 2014 to 2.9 per cent in 2016, its lowest level since 1998. However, it rose to 4.5 per cent in 2017.

The ranking of LLDCs on the human development index improved by only 1.5 per cent from 2014 to 2018. Progress has been recorded against some health- and education-related indicators, as well as with gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities, however, remain low.

Food security remains a challenge, as the dire impact of climate change continue to affect LLDCs, most of which are located in dryland, and are already impacted by desertification, land degradation and drought. Further, the devastation caused by cyclone Idai in Malawi and Zimbabwe is a vivid reminder of growing negative impact of climate change on the livelihoods across LLDCs.

Some progress was made in completing missing links and generally improving the quality of infrastructure for increased connectivity of LLDCs however challenges remain. Access to electricity in the LLDCs has increased but remains below the world average. ICT connectivity in LLDCs improved; however, the costs of ICT services remain high.

LLDCs continue to be marginalized from global trade, as their share of global merchandise exports declined from 1.19% in 2014 to 0.98% in 2018.
Interest in regional integration and cooperation grew among LLDCs and this is demonstrated by increase in the average number of regional trade agreements that the LLDCs were parties to, with the number of agreements per country ranging from one to nine.

The ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement has been impressive, as 25 out of the 26 LLDCs that are WTO members have ratified the Agreement. The implementation of the Agreement however is still lagging due to both financial and technical capacity challenges.

On structural transformation and economic diversification, limited progress has been achieved. The average value-added contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP in LLDCs has remained low and only increased slightly, from 9 per cent in 2014 to 9.6 per cent in 2017. 26 out of the 32 LLDCs are still commodities-dependent, meaning that commodities account for more than 60 per cent of their exports and therefore these countries remain vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations.

Regarding means of implementation, ODA flows to LLDCs increased from $24 billion in 2014 to $28 billion in 2017 but continue to be concentrated in a few LLDCs. Foreign direct investment flows declined from $28.7 billion in 2014 to $22.7 billion in 2017.

Excellencies,

It is evident that achieving the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining five years of its implementation calls for redoubling of efforts and accelerated implementation. This calls for innovative ideas and collective efforts of all the relevant stakeholders, including the LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, UN System organizations and the private sector. We must work harder to improve the lives of 508 million people in LLDCs if we want to live up to leaving no one behind. The midterm review offers us the opportunity to individually and collectively find ways of forging ahead and ensure that LLDCs are not left behind.

Allow me to now update you on the preparations for the Comprehensive high-level midterm review.
The General Assembly resolution 72/232 mandated OHRLLS to coordinate the preparatory process. Consistent with this mandate, OHRLLS, in collaboration with relevant regional commissions, organized three regional review meetings, for Euro-Asia, Africa and Latin America regions. In addition, 22 thematic pre-conference events relating to the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action were organized and two are still to be held in the month of October. The negotiations on the draft outcome document, which were co-facilitated by Ambassadors of Austria and Bhutan, were concluded in July 2019. I would like to congratulate Ambassadors of Austria and Bhutan for the smooth and timely conclusion of the negotiations that led to a consensual document that passed silence procedure.

OHRLLS continues to work closely with the President of the General Assembly, the Chair and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in organizing the Midterm Review and ensuring that the meeting is a success. I wish to emphasize that it will be important that the LLDCs participate in the midterm review at the highest possible level.

Excellency,

Before I conclude, I would like to bring to your attention some of the global meetings to be convened in 2020, in which the participation of the LLDCs will be fundamental. The 12th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference will be held in Kazakhstan in June 2020 and this will be the first WTO Ministerial meeting to be organized in an LLDCs. The Second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference will be held in China. The 15th UNCTAD Quadrennial Conference will take place in Barbados while the World Investment Forum will be hosted by United Arab Emirates.

I would also like to bring to your attention the ongoing negotiations on the International legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction as well as the ongoing discussion under the International Seabed Authority on exploitation of marine mineral resources. The participation of LLDCs in these discussions has been very low and I would like to
encourage you to fully engage in these processes to ensure that the interest of the LLDCs is preserved.

In concluding my remarks, let me reiterate Secretary-General is fully committed to advocating the priorities and needs of our most vulnerable member states. Similarly, the UN System stands ready to work with LLDCs in advancing their development agenda. I look forward to continuing to work closely with you in pursuit of the sustainable prosperity of the LLDCs.

Thank you.