Opening Remarks

for

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General

Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Ninth Inter-Agency Consultative Group Meeting on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs

12 November 2019
Conference Room 11, United Nations Secretariat Building
Dear colleagues,
Friends,

I warmly welcome you to our now ninth inter-agency consultative group meeting.

Once more our focus is on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs.

First, I would like to express my deep appreciation to His Excellency, Mr. Julio César Arriola, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Paraguay and the Chair of the LLDC Group. Thank you for making the time to be with us for our opening session.

And thank you for successfully leading the Group during this critical time of the midterm review preparations!

I also very warmly welcome colleagues that have joined through the video link.

This is a critical meeting. It is our last inter-agency meeting before the comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Today we will focus on what needs to be done to finalize preparations for the midterm review. We will also look at upcoming activities of importance to LLDCs in the first half of next year.

Please share with your principals my appreciation for all that you and your organizations have done to keep the concerns, the issues of the LLDCS high on the agenda.

Please continue to do so!

While Ms. Gladys Mutangadura of my office will brief us in more detail later, I want to draw your attention to a couple efforts made.

The midterm review has been priority over the past year and half.

OHRLLS has coordinated both the preparatory and the substantive process of the review.

As far as the national level preparations are concerned, twenty-one LLDCs have submitted their national review reports. These reports provide us all with very important country-specific inputs into the regional and global discussions.

Not only is all action eventually local but so are all solutions if they are to be sustainable.

In terms of regional preparations, all three regional review meetings, for the Euro-Asia, Africa and Latin America regions, were already held.

The last regional review, for the Latin America region, took place in June in Santiago, Chile at the headquarters of ECLAC.

All regional meetings adopted very useful and very forward-looking recommendations.
At the global level, collectively, some 20 pre-conference events have been organized by UN-OHRLLS and some of your organizations.

One of our recent meetings include the Ambassadorial Retreat in May this year here in New York, a side event during this year’s HLPF on Sustainable Energy; a LLDC side event during the Aid for Trade review; expert group meetings on Science, Technology and Innovation as well as on transit Cooperation and Trade Facilitation held in Geneva; and a meeting on Corridor Development and Management held in Mongolia.

We sure tried to be as participatory and inclusive as possible!

These efforts together with all of your most valuable inputs provided for very concrete elements for the draft outcome document of the midterm review.

I must thank the two co-facilitators for the draft - the Ambassadors of Bhutan and Austria were instrumental in facilitating the intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document.

The outcome document, in the form of a Political Declaration, has now consensually been agreed on by Member States. The declaration will be adopted during the midterm review.

OHRLLS currently works with the Office of the President of the General Assembly which is leading the organization of the midterm review itself and with other departments to finalize the programme for the midterm review.

We have also worked with many of you planning the organization of side events.

Due to the measures undertaken at Headquarters for reasons that all of us are aware of, the organization of side events is of course impacted because of the limitations to services that can be provided.

So, we must now make every effort to adapt to this situation. We have taken every measure possible to ensure that all requests for side events are accommodated. I kindly ask for your understanding and your flexibility in adjusting to these special circumstances.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This for a bit of housekeeping and let us get to substance.

The preparatory process has been quite revealing. Progress has been made in many areas of implementation of the VPoA. The glass is half full but that is not enough.

Last month, I presented the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the VPoA to the Second Committee of the General Assembly.

It was a significant report and moment. The report presented progress made over the last five years since adoption of the VPoA.
The report and my presentation were based on inputs from your organizations, the results of the preparatory activities, the national and regional reports and the outcomes of the pre-conference events.

The report referenced the mixed progress results. We also called attention to what this means for achieving the SDGs.

Significant developments can be recorded for regional, sub-regional and multilateral initiatives in the transit area of activities.

It is equally encouraging to see the ratification of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreements. But ratification of international transport-related conventions by both LLDCs and transit countries remains relatively low.

Some progress was made in completing missing links in transport networks and improving the quality of infrastructure to increase connectivity of LLDCs. However, challenges remain.

Encouraging progress has been made in access of people to electricity. But - yes there always has to be a but... - LLDCs continue to lag considerably behind when we look at global averages.

That is also the case when we look at access to and use of Internet and mobile subscriptions. One key factor here is that LLDCs continue to face excessive costs for broadband access.

On trade, LLDCs’ merchandise exports continue to account for less than one percent of global exports.

And to make matters more complex, exports continue to comprise mainly of primary commodities, with little value-added. So, LLDCS continue to be highly vulnerable to volatile markets in primary commodities.

The report is clear that while LLDCs have adopted a wide range of trade facilitation measures they continue to face capacity challenges to fully implement the provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

I am sure we all agree that it is good to sign but the real challenge, the real change comes from being able to put into practice that what you signed off on!

On regional cooperation, the report notes that an increasing number of LLDCs now participate in regional and sub-regional cooperation initiatives.

On priority 5, structural economic transformation in LLDCs, only limited progress has been made. Per se and with what I just referenced, this is not a surprise but this means little is happening for value-addition in the manufacturing sector. It also means reversing the de-industrialization trend remains a challenge for many LLDCs.

We all know of the critical importance of partnerships and development assistance for the LLDCs. This is probably more critical than ever - our collective credibility is at stake to leave no one behind in achieving what Agenda 2030 aims for!
While ODA to LLDCs has increased, it remains concentrated in a few countries. At the same time, we can see a decline in other external sources of finances for the LLDCs, such as foreign direct investment.

Dear colleagues,

The midterm review presents two chances.

It gives us as a system a chance to show effectiveness in how we as a UN family together lend support to the LLDCs.

It allows the international community to adjust efforts and direction to make sure that the ambitions of the Vienna Programme are achieved and are achieved in time.

The midterm review is not the end of a road - it is a next leg in a journey to destination!

I sincerely hope that its outcome is for all to rally and promote accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme in the next five years. We must remain vigilant and keep advocating for the special needs of the LLDCs and provide continued support.

OHRLLS will step up efforts to mobilize support for the midterm review in the few weeks now left.

We will also continue to mobilize the capacities of the UN system and work with all of you! My door is always open to you - we are all in this together and OHRLLS is your facilitator.

Let me now turn to what is immediately ahead and ahead next year.

There are a number of upcoming major conferences and meetings of importance to the LLDCs. They range from the COP25 to the 12th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference to be hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan; the Second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference to be held in China; the 15th UNCTAD Quadrennial Conference to be held in Barbados, and the World Investment Forum in United Arab Emirates.

The VPoA builds on synergies with and creates energies for other agendas. Therefore, the ongoing follow-up processes to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the HLPF, the Financing for Development Forum, they all are critical for the LLDCs.

We need to make sure that LLDCs’ concerns and needs are systematically brought to attention in these fora. This is essential to help accelerate LLDCs' progress towards their achievement of the SDGs.

So, I look forward to continuing and even building our close partnerships and us working together in supporting the LLDCs in the follow-up from the midterm review of the VPoA.

Ladies and gentlemen,
With these few opening remarks, It is my honor to give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Julio César Arriola, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Paraguay the Chair of the LLDC Group.