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Statement by

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

MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE VIENNA PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

High-level panel on challenges and opportunities for the Vienna Programme of Action and its interlinkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Friday 6 December 2019, Trusteeship Chamber

UNHQ, New York
Your Excellency, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the General Assembly
Your Excellency, Mona Juul, President of ECOSOC
Your Excellency, José Antonio Dos Santos, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs for Paraguay, Chair of the LLDC Group
Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director, UN Sustainable Solutions Center and Center for Sustainable Development, Columbia University
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2014 we started implementing the Vienna Programme of Action—a holistic development framework that reflects a commitment of the international community to help LLDCs tackle landlockedness through its priority areas of: Fundamental Transit Policy Issues; Infrastructure Development and Maintenance; International Trade and Trade Facilitation; Regional Integration and Cooperation, Structural Economic Transformation, and Means of Implementation.

A year later the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a transformative global framework with ambitions to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development and protect our environment, while leaving no one behind.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the special needs and challenges faced by LLDCs and stresses the need for the international community to support the development efforts of LLDCs. The World Leaders noted that the VPoA is integral part of the 2030 Agenda. Effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the SDGs are mutually self-reinforcing.

Indeed, on the one hand, the Vienna Programme of Action helps turns the attention to context-specific challenges of LLDCs, for instance trade facilitation and regional integration, all of which are more or less silent in the 2030 Agenda but are central to the sustainable development of the landlocked developing countries. On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda complement the Vienna Programme of Action by delving more in the specifics, covering social development issues—including poverty, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation and full employment—as well as issues environmental sustainability, peace, justice and strong institutions, which are all determining success factors to all priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action.
Further, both agendas implemented together, will help advance LLDCs’ development, including on trade, sustainable energy, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, transport systems, economic diversification and industrialization, regional economic integration and interconnectivity, technological growth and innovation, means of implementation and capacity building on statistics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This midterm review Meeting is an important occasion to assess where we stand, drawn some lessons and chart out a way forward. It is the culmination of more than a year-long preparation. We worked together with the rest of the UN system, our partner institutions and Member States, to organize a series of pre-conference events and undertake comprehensive analyses of the progress, constraints, and challenges on the implementation of the VPoA. Many LLDCs prepared national reports. Three regional review meetings were held for the Euro and Asia region; Africa region and Latin America region.

All these activities collectively informed the midterm review with on-the-ground perspectives of the achievements and constraints faced by the LLDCs.

As noted in presentations yesterday and today, tangible progress and achievements have been made on most of the VPoA priority areas since 2014. Together with their transit partners, LLDCs have made important gains in upgrading railways, roads, ports, air transport and inland waterways, as well as building and utilizing corridors.

The high ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by LLDCs and transit countries means that the LLDCs are poised to yield greater improvements in transit time if the Agreement is fully implemented.

Progress was made to improve energy and ICT connectivity of the LLDCs. Interest in regional integration and cooperation grew among LLDCs. Some agreements reached over the review period include the Eurasian Economic Union, African Continental Free Trade Area, and several other multilateral agreements such as the China, Mongolia and Russian Federation economic corridor to mention just a few.

Efforts are also being made on diversification and upgrading of their economies, export promotion and private sector development.

There was some increase in ODA support to LLDCs over the review period. And as we can see from this Midterm Review Meeting, the commitment to the Vienna Programme is strong.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite this progress, let us be clear: we are far from where we need to be to successfully turn landlocked developing countries into land-linked countries. There are many challenges that continue to impede progress that we must address with urgency. There are also opportunities that have potential to significantly improve the situation. I will highlight some of these.

The LLDCs account for about 509 million people. That is some 7 per cent of the world's population. They live on about 22 per cent of the total global land area. Yet, they continue to be marginalized from global trade, as their share of global merchandise exports declined to below 1 per cent in 2018. This is a critical issue as it is linked in some measure to the LLDC’s continuing high costs to export and import.

Physical connectivity - the hard infrastructure, trade facilitation and the soft infrastructure and making infrastructure climate-resilient are fundamental issues we must tackle if we truly wish to see the integration of LLDCs into global trade.

At the same time, much more needs to be done to ensure that progress is made on trade facilitation, in particular to build the capacity of LLDCs and transit countries to implement their Trade Facilitation Agreements.

The LLDCs have struggled with adding value to their exports as most of them are still dependent on exports of primary commodities, leaving them vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations. New and rapidly evolving technologies and innovative solutions offer unprecedented opportunities for social, economic and environmental advancement of LLDCs. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, big data, digitalization and renewable energy technologies are available. Diffusion of these technologies to LLDCs will continue to be critical.

Deforestation, land degradation, desertification, droughts, melting of glaciers, environmental degradation and disasters continue to undermine LLDCs’ efforts to achieve the objectives of the VPoA and the SDGs. These can be tackled by bringing together adaptation, mitigation and development strategies in a coherent way that will enhance opportunities for low-carbon and climate-resilient development.

The High-level declaration clearly notes the challenges in regular collection and analysis of data to monitor and report on some of the specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action. The 2030 Agenda calls for provision of capacity-
building support on statistics for developing countries including LLDCs, including the strengthening of national data systems. There is clearly potential to coordinate to support the advancement of LLDCs in this area.

The financing needs of LLDCs are substantial, in particular towards infrastructure development and maintenance. National governments, development partners, international financial institutions, development banks and the private sector all have a significant role to play in scaling up their contributions to sustainable development financing. Let us seize the momentum from this Midterm Review to revitalize our partnerships to support the LLDCs.

For our part, the United Nations system is committed to work in a coherent fashion to support your efforts.

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.

But it also clear that there are many synergies in the global agendas. All the areas that I have just highlighted are part of the SDGs, in one way or another, or could affect the ability of LLDCs to attain the SDGs by 2030.

We need to deepen the interlinkages between the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda. We need to work to integrate LLDC issues prominently in the follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda, including Financing for Development Forum, the High-Level Political Forum.

Greater forging of synergies between the Vienna Programme and other global frameworks, such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the New Urban Agenda; and the Paris Agreement; is critical since these are opportunities to address the special needs of the LLDCs in a more holistic and integrated manner.

Thank you.