

Summary Report of the briefing of the UN Deputy Secretary-General to the Group of LLDCs on the reform of the UN development system and the impact of COVID-19

Date: 03 April 2020

Location: Virtual, New York

Time: 10:15 to 11:15

Introduction

The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, gave a briefing to the Group Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) on the ongoing reform of the UN development system and the measures taken by the organization to address the negative effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. A series of such briefings is also planned for other two vulnerable groups. The event was organized jointly the support of the Office of the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, LLDCs and Small Developing Island States (UN-OHRLLS). H.E. Ambassador Kairat Umarov, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations and Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries moderated the meeting. In addition to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Fekitamoeloa Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and UN High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and Mr. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs also attended the virtual briefing. The meeting was attended by over 60 participants including Permanent representatives and experts from LLDCs and staff members from the Executive Office of the Secretary General, UN-OHRLLS, UN DESA and DCO.

Opening by H.E. Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the LLDC Group

H.E. Mr. Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Group of LLDCs expressed his gratitude to Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General for the briefing in light of the devastating global COVID-19 pandemic. He extended his gratitude also to Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa Utoikamanu, the UN High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS as well as Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. He stressed that it is clear that LLDCs' economies will be greatly affected by the pandemic given their vulnerability and level of development. He explained that considering that one third of the LLDCs' population already lives under extreme poverty and the entire Group lags behind the world average in human development index, the pandemic threatens to reverse progress that LLDCs have achieved so far on the SDGs. The Chair informed that as of 2 April 2020, the WHO reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 in 27 of the 32 LLDCs. He expressed that enhancing support to LLDCs is necessary and urgent and a global response to addressing the impact of this crisis is key. He stressed the fundamental role of the UN and closer collaboration and coordination with the UN development system to find ways to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

He emphasized that as the reform of the UN development system (UNDS) continues, the challenges and needs of LLDCs should be taken into account. He expressed the Group's appreciation to Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General for highlighting the LLDCs' needs during the briefing of the Secretary-General to Member States on the COVID-19 pandemic last week. He extended his appreciation to the Secretary-General for his support during the briefing to LLDCs' Group in March to elaborate a roadmap as a visionary document on the practical steps to take to implement the VPoA in this decade. He informed that he hoped that the roadmap will be developed by UN-OHRLLS, in close collaboration with UNCTAD, DESA, ITC, World Bank and other stakeholders to achieve better coordination of efforts, cohesion and cooperation to "Deliver as One".

H.E. Mr. Umarov highlighted that Kazakhstan welcomes the five broad transformative areas put forward by the Secretary-General. He highlighted that further redesigning of the UNDS is needed, bringing a stronger regional and interregional focus to coordination. He explained that all the reform workstreams are mutually-dependent as the Member States face development challenges of a transboundary and transregional nature, especially in case of LLDCs that greatly depend on their neighbours.

The Chair noted that the General Assembly will conduct the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of the UN system operational activities (QCPR) this fall and stressed that greater practical deliverables could be achieved if a Regional Collaborative Platform was established, with inter-regional focus since countries belonging to different geographic areas remain to be closely interrelated and dependent on each other. He asked whether an interregional coordination mechanism within the QCPR reform which is taking place this year could be secured.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa Utoikamanu and UN-OHRLLS for support to the LLDCs. He noted that the General Assembly (resolution 74/262) requested the Secretary-General to strengthen the capacities of UN-OHRLLS and appreciated that the Secretary-General expressed his commitment to work with the LLDC Group on this request. He reiterated the Group's consistent and committed partnership to the UN family to address the needs of LLDCs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Remarks by Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina Mohammed

Ms. Amina Mohammed appreciated the opportunity to brief the LLDC Group. She noted that the growing global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic reminds us of the critical need to bridge the gaps towards the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted that as we face this unprecedented human crisis, we need to also start thinking about the recovery, with the response anchored in our promise to deliver on the SDGs. She emphasized that this crisis constitutes, for the first time, a development emergency response. People are being forced to choose between health pandemic and hunger but that should not be the case. She communicated that it is the Secretary-General's conviction to address all socio-economic issues at the same time, as well as to profit from the opportunity of this crisis to scale up online education and cash transfer programs for example. She appreciated Member States' conviction and support through the GA resolution of 2 April. She informed that the framework for how UN will roll out the socio-economic support to countries around the world should be in place next week. She informed that the Fund created by the Secretary-General has already seen some donors contribute.

She noted that the COVID-19 situation is litmus test for the UN reforms. She noted that it was clear from her discussions with the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions that post-COVID-19 world will place a lot of emphasis on the regional level of the development agenda. She noted that benefits of the reforms are being seen, as for example the RCs are able to bring the whole UN Country Team (UNCT) behind WHO's leadership and ensure that 94% of countries have emergency plans on their way to be executed.

Ms. Mohammed shared that the Secretary-General had conversations with few LLDC Heads of State and has requested to see if the UN can come up with an initiative that would bring focus to the specific challenges of the LLDCs and to ensure that LLDCs benefit from the

upcoming fiscal arrangements and stimulus packages and are not left behind as we look at the barriers to trade and transport and connectivity. She stressed that responding to the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will take global solidarity and coordinated action. She urged the Group to indicate the priorities of the LLDCs and the needed support from the UN system. She also referred to the efforts of the G20, including commitments of G20 Trade Ministers to lift barriers in the supply chains. She reassured that the UN will continue to engage with Member States, Central Bank Governors, IFIs, etc. to make sure that initiatives are inclusive.

Interventions by Member States

H.E. Mr. Julio Cesar Arriola, Ambassador of Paraguay noted that the synergies developed between the UN, Government and civil society during the drafting of the framework of cooperation agreement that was just signed between the UN and Paraguay will prove useful in fighting the COVID-19. He commended the COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan and asked whether there are provisions to support countries in special situations, such as the LLDCs within this fund. He inquired whether there will be similar initiatives to assist economic recovery of countries after the outbreak has passed, with a focus in vulnerable countries. He noted this could be an opportunity to launch large infrastructure projects, with support of UN and multilateral institutions, which could help boost economic recovery.

H.E. Mr. Mohammad Naeemi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Afghanistan highlighted the additional challenges of countries in conflict or post-conflict that are affecting implementation of the SDGs, such as access to health facilities. He stressed that the UNCT in Afghanistan is working with national authorities on COVID-19 response, and that a few UN employees had tested positive. He emphasized that regional and inter-regional cooperation is the key for LLDCs. He expressed his appreciation to the countries in the region that have already supported his country. He inquired on the plan of the UN to provide more effective support to Central Asian countries and, in particular, the most vulnerable LLDCs in the region regarding COVID-19. He asked how the UN, its specialized agencies and multilateral financial institutions support countries in dealing with returning refugees, migrants and IDPs in these special circumstances.

H.E. Mr. Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia noted that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, realigning of the UN regional assets is even more crucial to adapt the UN system to addressing the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. He asked what measures the DSG envisages to adjust the process of optimization of these regional structures to meet the COVID-19 related development challenges and promote regional development. He highlighted that the significant restrictions to freedom of movement have further exacerbated the geographical disadvantage of being landlocked. He noted that the SG stressed the need for efforts to maintain transit freight transport for LLDCs and asked how the process of optimization would address this issue, whether the UN has any contingency plans for essential goods and equipment to be transported to LLDCs struck by the COVID-19, considering the geographical constraints but also the fact that transportation links have been severely affected.

H.E. Mr. Rubén Darío Cuéllar Suárez, Permanent Representative of Bolivia noted that the full effects of the pandemic are not yet known but will have long-lasting consequences especially on vulnerable countries. He expressed that years of waste and not prioritizing health programs make Bolivia particularly vulnerable. He asked whether the UN has the contingency plans for countries in special circumstances like LLDCs. He further asked for any insights on how to

solve transnational problems such as migratory policies of neighbouring countries that might cause repatriation of people that the country is not able to control.

Response from Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina Mohammed

Ms. Amina Mohammed noted the need for the UN to raise awareness specifically about the challenges of the most vulnerable countries like LLDCs, as well as highlighting the need for global solidarity with vulnerable countries like the LLDCs. She informed that the UN is working on a global response, led by WHO on emergency preparedness. She noted that some countries had already been identified to benefit from the \$2 billion humanitarian package, and the list will be expanded over the next few weeks to other countries in special circumstances, including those in conflict. She added that discussion will be taking place with World Bank and other IFIs to help channel their resources to more vulnerable countries.

In response to the comment from Bolivia, she also recognised the issues of healthcare workers and migratory issues in the country. She noted the important role of the RCs in communicating back to the UN on the type of assistance required by the different countries. She informed that the Secretary-General will pick up on specific issues each week, such as healthcare workers or women and she welcomed feedback on any specific issues that the LLDC Group would like to be raised.

In addition to emergency planning, she noted that the UN response is also focused on the design of the socio-economic impact response, which the Member States will be briefed on the following week. She noted that together with OHRLLS and DESA a team will be put in place to work on the designs specifically for the LLDCs.

The Deputy Secretary-General noted that several of the regional commissions will be focusing on issues of refugees, migrants and IDPs in light of COVID-19 response. She emphasised that priority will be placed on extracting disaggregated data to see where vulnerable populations are.

In terms of UN support particularly for medical supplies, she informed that UN ACT has just been established under WHO and DOS leadership, and Member States can make direct contact for assistance to connect people to medical supplies. She committed to ensure that information on availability of this initiative is distributed to all Member States.

She further noted that UN is working with the Ministers of Trade to ensure that borders are open, focusing on those countries that are hit hard by COVID-19 and countries where 90% of medical supplies are imported. She pointed out that while the Trade Ministers of the G20 have indicated that they will keep trade open it is important that the non-G20 countries should also keep trade open. She highlighted that measures to deal with economic challenges ahead after coming out of the COVID-19 era are also being discussed, including with Ministers of Finance, to deal with liquidity and debt issues.

Regarding economic recovery, she noted that plans for building back are already being generated and encouraged LLDCs to follow suit with the support of the UN. She added that the UN is also reaching out to business community and NGOs on community action. Regarding the launch of large infrastructure plans and investments, she noted that this is a good time to look at the possibilities and examine to see what benefits the investments would bring, in terms of helping the economy recover, bringing jobs and strengthening health systems. She

underscored that if new hospitals are being put in place now for isolation, it is important that countries think about how these hospitals can be effectively utilized after the pandemic. She added that with much of infrastructure going online, that this would also be an opportunity for the LLDCs to enhance their transport and digital connectivity.

Remarks by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ʻUtoikamanu, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ʻUtoikamanu reiterated that economies of the LLDCs are likely to be seriously affected by COVID-19, with impacts through reduced trade, transport, tourism and private investment. She emphasized the need for all to stand together in solidarity. She affirmed that OHRLLS stands ready to continue to provide support to the LLDC Group. She noted that OHRLLS is ready to provide substantive support to the Group in intergovernmental negotiations and provide background documents or inputs reflecting the impact of COVID-19 and needed response from the international community.

She noted that as the convener of the UN inter-agency consultative group for LLDCs, the Office would reach out to the relevant UN system agencies and international organizations to discuss policy responses in particular as they relate to the implementation of the VPoA and the SDGs in light of the impact of COVID-19. She explained that LLDCs depend on efficient transit networks and connection to global market and stressed that in these special circumstances trade, cross-border transport networks and supply chains should remain open. She further highlighted that any restrictions on traffic in transit need to be avoided to ensure that goods can reach the LLDCs without hinderance.

She also reaffirmed that OHRLLS will continue to advocate for increased support to LLDCs, in particular to respond to the threat of COVID-19. She informed that a network of LLDC RCs have been set up and noted that working in collaboration with the RCs will be critical at this time. She concluded by extending OHRLLS' support to the Group.

Remarks by Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

Mr. Liu Zhenmin noted that he established a taskforce in early February devoted to undertake an analysis and assessment of the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also supported the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on COVID-19. He noted that while rich and emerging economies are being impacted most, other countries will likely be also affected, including by the lockdown measures. He mentioned that the COVID-19 cases in LLDCs are not very high, and that LLDCs should follow the health guidance and follow the practices of other countries to prevent the imports of cases. He highlighted the need to protect supply chains, in particular for medical goods and food.

He stressed that this is an unprecedented human, financial, economic and health crisis all together and emphasized that global recession will be inevitable. However, he posited that the recession will depend on the preparedness and response of countries. He noted that responses are needed now to mitigate the impacts of the global recession. He advised that LLDCs should start planning now how to respond and recover from the crisis, with broad comprehensive plans. He added that while there is no one size fits all, the RCs and UNCTs can help to work with the LLDCs on country specific targeted approaches.

Continuation of interventions from Member States

A question from Lao PDR related to how the UN Secretariat and DCO plan to ensure adequate sustainable funding for implementation of the UNDS reform, taking into account decline in ODA and expected decline in resources from contributing countries which are affected by COVID-19, and whether there is a need for reprogramming amidst the crisis. They also enquired as to how the UN development system is working together as one to support the Government in LDCs and LLDCs on the ground to mitigate the pandemic.

H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, the Ambassador of Botswana emphasized that economic assessments are already projecting global growth to shrink. He highlighted that in terms of capacity needed, the latest GA resolution on budget requested the Secretary-General to take action necessary to ensure that additional post and non-post resources are allocated to the LLDC and SIDS subprogrammes in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2021. He stressed that this should be looked at seriously as the request to capacitate OHRLLS was made even before the COVID-19 pandemic. He underscored that capacity of OHRLLS needs to be enhanced to support the LLDCs, even more so now.

Response from Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina Mohammed

Ms. Amina Mohammed replied to the question from Lao PDR that building on the existing good support from RCs and DCO, countries are now even asking how they can provide more resources to support the additional COVID-19 related work. She explained that this is because countries have seen good returns from the partnership between WHO, RCs and UNCTs. She stressed that the momentum is very high and the support is available.

Regarding the special fund that the SG has created for socio economic impact response, she informed that two or three countries have already contributed, and additional countries have shown interest to contribute. She explained that small amount of reprogramming is taking place, for example unused resources from travel that will no longer happen are available for COVID-19 support.

Regarding how to ensure the UN system works as one, she answered that a framework to support the COVID-19 socioeconomic response is being developed under the leadership of RCs with support of UNDP and UNCTs, and will be shared next week. She encouraged the LLDCs to emphasize to UN agencies on the ground to act as one.

Ms. Mohammed concurred with the representative of Botswana that the capability and capacity of the Secretariat is constrained by the budget but stressed the importance of flexibility especially now when dealing with COVID-19, noting that the UN will try to be creative with its funds. At the same time, she explained that COVID-19 should not put a pause on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in fact we can scale up opportunities for advancing the SDGs. She noted that recruitment of additional staff required in OHRLLS has been given the go ahead and expressed hope that it will be looked at more critically in the next budget. She indicated that the Regional Economic Commissions had also expressed their concern and will look forward to how to utilize additional funding that is coming to strengthen short term needs for expertise.

She highlighted that partnerships should be strengthened, noting her earlier discussions with over 100 businesses under the Global Compact where the need to keep trade and supply chains open was also emphasized. She concluded by underscoring that the UN is becoming more

flexible every day in responding to this development emergency in record time in addition to the health and humanitarian response.

Conclusion of the Meeting

H.E. Mr. Kairat Umarov kindly requested the Deputy Secretary-General to continue to brief the LLDC Group in the future. He reemphasized the vulnerable situation that the LLDCs are in. He noted that even before the COVID pandemic there was need to deal with the development issues of the LLDCs, now with the pandemic it is urgent to work on the needs of the LLDCs including on health, humanitarian and economic responses. He reiterated his appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General for her solidarity with the Group. He concluded by thanking all participants for their online attendance and for valuable remarks and comments.

Annex: List of participants

Member States

	Name	Mission	Title
1.	Mr. Mohammad W. Naeemi	Afghanistan	DPR
2.	H.E. Mr. Mher Margaryan	Armenia	PR
3.	Mr. Davit Knyazyan	Armenia	DPR
4.	Mr. Davit Grigoryan	Armenia	Second Secretary
5.	Ms. Billur Ahmadova	Azerbaijan	Attache
6.	Mr. Namgyal Dorji	Bhutan	Second Secretary.
7.	H.E. Mr. Rubén Darío Cuéllar Suárez	Bolivia	PR
8.	Ms. Liliana Stephanie Oropeza Acosta	Bolivia	Second Secretary
9.	H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile	Botswana	PR
10.	Mr. Katlego Mmalane	Botswana	First Secretary
11.	Mr. Sylvestre Nicolas Compaore	Burkina Faso	Second Counsellor
12.	H.E. Mr. Albert Shingiro	Burundi	PR
13.	Mr. Delphin Ndayemeye	Burundi	Second Counsellor
14.	Mr. Gademi Habib	Chad	Counsellor
15.	Mr. Biruk Mekonnen	Ethiopia	Minister Counsellor
16.	Mr. Addisalem Desta	Ethiopia	Second Committee Delegate
17.	H.E. Kairat Umarov	Kazakhstan	PR
18.	Mr. Arman Issetov	Kazakhstan	First DPR
19.	Mr. Nurzhan Rakhmetov	Kazakhstan	First Secretary
20.	Mr. Anuar Zhainakov	Kazakhstan	Counsellor
21.	Mr. Maken Mukashev	Kazakhstan	First Secretary
22.	Mr. Daniyar Omurzakov	Kyrgyzstan	Third Secretary
23.	H.E. Mr. Anouparb Vongnorkeo	Lao PDR	PR
24.	Mr. Virayouth Viengviseth	Lao PDR	Second Secretary
25.	Mr. Tieho Andrew Rankhone	Lesotho	Counsellor
26.	Mrs. Renata Chivundu	Malawi	First Secretary

27.	H.E. Mr. Issa Konfourou	Mali	PR
28.	Mr. Aboubacar Sissoko	Mali	Second Counsellor
29.	Mr. Andrei Nicolenco	Moldova	First Secretary
30.	H.E. Mr. Vorshilov Enkhbold	Mongolia	PR
31.	Ms. Gereltsetseg Baatarsuren	Mongolia	Counsellor
32.	H.E. Mr. Amrit Bahadur Rai	Nepal	PR
33.	Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari	Nepal	DPR
34.	Ms. Prathma Uprety	Nepal	Counsellor
35.	Mr. Suvanga Parajuli	Nepal	Second Secretary
36.	Mr. Samadou Ousman	Niger	Second Counsellor
37.	H.E. Mr. Julio César Arriola Ramírez	Paraguay	PR
38.	Mr. Alberto Caballero	Paraguay	DPR
39.	Mr. David Merardo Martínez Sugasti	Paraguay	Second Secretary
40.	Mr. Fabián Ybarra Fernández	Paraguay	First Secretary
41.	Mr. Furkat Lafizov	Tajikistan	DPR
42.	Mr. Firuz Kosimov	Tajikistan	Third Secretary
43.	Mr. Rovshen Annaberdiyev	Turkmenistan	DPR
44.	H.E. Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov	Uzbekistan	PR
45.	Mr. Laziz Karaev	Uzbekistan	First Secretary
46.	H.E. Mr. Ngosa Simbyakula	Zambia	PR
47.	Mrs. Theresah Chipulu Luswili Chanda	Zambia	Counsellor
48.	Mrs. Petronellar Nyagura	Zimbabwe	DPR
49.	Ms. K. Taremba	Zimbabwe	Minister Counsellor
50.	Mr. Tapiwa Roy Rupende	Zimbabwe	Counsellor
51.	Mr. Kingstone Ziyera	Zimbabwe	Minister Counsellor

UN Secretariat

52.	Ms. Amina Mohammed	UN	Deputy Secretary-General
53.	Mr. Zhenmin Liu	DESA	Under-Secretary-General
54.	Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu	UN-OHRLLS	Under-Secretary-General
55.	Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg	UN-OHRLLS	Chief, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS
56.	Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox	UN-OHRLLS	Director
57.	Ms. Gladys Mutangadura	UN-OHRLLS	Senior Programme Officer
58.	Mr. Aniket Ghai	UN-OHRLLS	Senior Economic Affairs Officer
59.	Ms. Nnana Pheto	UN-OHRLLS	Economic Affairs Officer
60.	Ms. Dagmar Hertova	UN-OHRLLS	Programme Officer
61.	Mr. Conor O'Loughlin	UN-OHRLLS	Advocacy Unit
62.	Mr. Tomas Gonzales	UN-OHRLLS	Programme Management Officer
63.	Ms. Malwina Buldys	UN-OHRLLS	Advocacy Unit
64.	Ms. Sojeong Yoon	UN-OHRLLS	Economic Affairs Intern
65.	Mr. Nelson Muffuh	EOSG	

66.	Ms. Rosemary Kalapurakal	DCO	Chief
67.	Ms. Silva Bonacito	DCO	Public Information Officer
68.	Ms. Mariangela Parra-Lancourt	DESA	Senior Economic Affairs Officer
69.	Ms. Fleur Vernat	EOSG	
70.	Mr. Peter Ho	EOSG	