



## **Ministers from landlocked developing countries call for improved transport, economic opportunities and trade facilitation**

Press Release

Astana, 17 May 2018

A new declaration that calls for improved transport, promotes economic transformation and better trade has been adopted at a Ministerial meeting of landlocked developing countries in Astana, Kazakhstan today, to better integrate these countries into the global trading system.

Ministers and senior government officials from the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) gathered in Astana, Kazakhstan from 16 to 17 of May 2018, for a two-day **Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Transport**.

“The Ministerial Meeting has adopted the Astana declaration that covers very important areas, crucial for successfully improving the connectivity of the LLDCs and assisting them to harness their trade potential to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” said Ms. Fekita “Utoikamanu, the High-Representative and Under-Secretary-General for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Islands developing States. “The meeting provided a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learnt and also provided an opportunity to highlight initiatives that support promotion of connectivity and trade in the LLDCs” .

The outcome declaration of the meeting splits into three main sections, in line with the thematic sessions that were held during the first day of the meeting.

On **Improving Transport Connectivity**, the declaration recognized the critical role of transport, quality infrastructure and transit systems for the LLDCs and the need to enhance soft infrastructure including through harmonization and simplification of cross-border procedures. At the same time, it acknowledged that transport is still inadequate in the LLDCs and missing links are a major problem. Comprehensive actions and partnerships are required to deal with the magnitude of the infrastructure gap. The LLDCs Group called for the international community, in particular multilateral and regional development banks, to provide LLDCs with technical support to develop bankable implementable and financially viable infrastructure and transport projects.

On **Promoting Economic Structural Transformation**, the LLDCs Group stressed the importance of industrial development and the building of capacities in the productive sectors as means to achieve structural transformation, economic diversification and value addition.

An enabling international economic environment to complement the LLDCs' structural economic transformation efforts is crucial. The Declaration called upon the international community to specifically assist LLDCs in implementing industrial policies, diversifying our export bases, enhancing value addition and strengthening their capacity to integrate into regional and global value chains.

On **Trade and Trade Facilitation**, the importance of a universal, open and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system was underscored as important means to achieve the SDGs, but the Group expressed concern over the stalemate in the WTO negotiations and an increase in protectionist measures.

The declaration called on WTO Members to expedite the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as it creates significant opportunity to improve the speed and efficiency of border crossing procedures and thereby reducing the high costs faced by the LLDCs. The importance of ratifying and implementing other relevant international, regional and sub-regional conventions related to trade facilitation to reduce trade costs and delays was also underscored.

Finally, the declaration expressed appreciation towards the Government of Kazakhstan and UN-OHRLS for their support in the hosting and the organization of this meeting and acknowledged the efforts of Paraguay as the Chair of the Group of LLDCs.

The Ministerial Meeting brought together more than 80 participants. The first day took place at Marriott Astana Hotel. On the second day, the meeting moved to the Congress Center of the Capital, where it was held on the side lines of the Astana Economic Forum 2018.

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