



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Statement by

**H.E. Mohammad Haneef Atmar
Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs**

at the

**Annual Ministerial Meeting of the
Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)**

New York
23 September 2020

Your Excellency Mr. Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Chair of the Landlocked Developing Countries,

Distinguished Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Republic of Kazakhstan, in its capacity as the Chair of the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for organizing this year's Annual Ministerial Meeting.

I would also like to thank the International Think Tank (ITT) for LLDCs for its important work towards improving our understanding of the challenges faced by our nations through collecting and analyzing data on topics of shared concerns. Afghanistan is contributing to the work and functioning of the ITT for LLDCs and encourages all other members to do so.

Mr. Chairman,

2020 is a challenging year for the international community, especially for the LLDCs as the COVID -19 pandemic has caused global social and economic disruption. The efforts of Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa Utoikamanu, the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and Kazakhstan as the Chair of the LLDCs have contributed significantly to minimize the negative impacts, both in response to the pandemic and in our quest for development. I would especially like to extend our appreciation to Kazakhstan for developing the Roadmap for the LLDCs. We believe that the implementation of the Roadmap will increase the effectiveness of the group and contribute to the implementation of the Vienna Program of Action (VPoA) and the SDGs.

As we know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on our nations. The nature of our geography has made us dependent on open borders and the free-flow of goods between countries. We must continue to work together to advocate for our needs and ensure the maintenance of global trade and supply chains. Further efforts are needed to promote sustainable transport and infrastructure investments. We must seize the opportunity in conversations about the lessons learned from the pandemic to promote our needs. Building back better should include efforts to further enhance connectivity between landlocked states and our neighbors and to promote regional trade and investment. In this connection, I also would like to recall the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Part X, article 125: "...landlocked States shall enjoy freedom of transit through the territory of transit States by all means of transport."

Excellencies,

Afghanistan believes that effective implementation of the VPoA within its timeframe remains imperative for all LLDCs and the world as a whole. LLDCs will not achieve the SDGs without the implementation of the VPoA.

The Government of Afghanistan is fully committed to implement the VPoA, as outlined in our February 2019 VPoA National Report. Our Government has mainstreamed the VPoA into national development plans and established institutional mechanisms to work towards the full implementation of the Program and the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a land-locked and post-conflict country, Afghanistan continues to face numerous special development needs and challenges, including those related to lack of access to regional and international markets, infrastructure gaps, investment deficits as well as a shortage of human and institutional capacity in various areas. To address Afghanistan's complex needs, the Government has taken a number of important steps.

Afghanistan has made intensive efforts to utilize its central location as a regional land-bridge connecting Central Asia with South Asia. In this regard, projects such as the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, the Five Nations Railway Corridor, and energy projects like CASA 1000 and TAPI, electricity and natural gas initiatives will have a profound impact on regional connectivity and economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace, security and stability are prerequisite to achieve sustainable development. Terrorism and insecurity continue to be the main obstacle to our efforts for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. To end decades of violence, the government and people of Afghanistan welcomed the peace negotiations with the Taliban and constructively engaged in this process. Therefore, we see the Doha meeting as a unique opportunity for creating an environment conducive for peace and sustainable development where the values and gains of the last nineteen years are protected and built upon. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express our gratitude to our international partners for providing this opportunity.

Additionally, the upcoming Geneva Conference on Afghanistan will significantly contribute to the peace negotiations and development. The conference will provide a unique opportunity for both the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to discuss Afghanistan's strategy and vision for socio-economic development in the next five years.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,**

Afghanistan joins others in calling for increased global cooperation and solidarity in our shared aim to implement the VPoA. We especially look forward to increased regional economic cooperation, in this regard. Additional targeted support is, furthermore, essential to ensure the timely implementation of the Program of Action, especially as we face the COVID-19 pandemic and its disastrous socio-economic consequences.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, my delegation is firmly convinced that your effective leadership will help us achieve meaningful progress on the VPoA and the SDGs. You can count on my delegation's full cooperation and we hope that our experience as an LLDC emerging from a situation of conflict will benefit other countries in similar situations.

I thank you.

