



STATEMENT

by

**H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers
of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)
under the theme**

**“Partnering for accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of
Action and achieving sustainable development in LLDCs in the COVID-19 Era”**

(23 September 2020)

Excellencies,

Dear Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you for the annual ministerial meeting of LLDCs.

We meet at a time of crisis and we need to step up international cooperation both to defeat the virus and to address its consequences.

At the national level, Azerbaijan adopted the Action Plan, which is considered not only as an anti-crisis response to the pandemic, but also serves multiple goals of sustainable development in the post-pandemic period. The World Health Organization (WHO) has therefore illustrated Azerbaijan as a model country in the fight against COVID-19.

To bolster the COVID response efforts across the world, Azerbaijan allocated \$ 10 million to WHO for countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Azerbaijan has put forward a number of important initiatives, including the convening of the special session of the UN General Assembly and the Summit of the Non-Alignment Movement Contact Group.

Mr. Chairman,

The vulnerability of LLDCs to cross-border restrictions and border closures necessitate a concerted action to enhance connectivity and sustainable functioning of international trade and transport corridors. Regional cooperation is crucial during a pandemic. For example, through collaboration and coordination, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Central Asian countries have ensured the smooth flow of critical supplies during the crisis. More regional cooperation will be needed when moving to the “new normal”. Regional integration mechanisms can play an important role through supporting regional trade agreements (RTAs). Application of innovative solutions for improving digital freight corridors, including blockchain technologies, is of particular importance.

Azerbaijan has been an enabler of inter- and intra-regional transport connectivity projects. These projects are transforming our country into a trans-regional logistical hub. East-West Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, North-South, South-West and North-West trade routes are the key infrastructure projects designed to increase transit capacity across Eurasia. We have also launched a new cooperation format among three landlocked countries – Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, through which we promote, among others, the Lapis Lazuli transport route to unlock the potential of our brotherly country Afghanistan.

Azerbaijan's transport sector has undergone significant reforms in terms of upgrading physical infrastructure and improvement of the regulatory framework. Over the last 15 years, the Government has invested more than \$25 bln in transport infrastructure alone. Crucial initiatives of Azerbaijan, such as backbone railway line Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, Baku International Sea Trade Port, and the Alat Free Economic Zone (AFEZ), will increase opportunities for trans-regional growth in trade and investment. We will continue to provide a stable and transparent business environment to attract more investments and support the diversification drive.

As regards the energy sector, Azerbaijan has enhanced its role as a reliable energy supplier. Southern Gas Corridor is nearing its completion and it will be the most tangible delivery of strengthened interconnectivity.

Protection of critical infrastructure is a very important issue. The recent provocation by the Armenian side in July 2020 on Azerbaijan-Armenia border is a clear reminder of this. Armenian armed forces threatened among others the critical energy and transportation infrastructure. This infrastructure is not only essential to Azerbaijan's economic vitality but is also of utmost importance for the smooth functioning of the trans-regional corridors connecting wider Eurasian region. This provocation highlighted once more the extreme fragility of status quo and the need for the soonest settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has been contributing to the LLDC process since its inception. We remain committed to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and will continue our efforts to advance interests of this Group in international platforms.

Thank you for your attention.