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**Opening Remarks by Ms. Rabab Fatima, Secretary-General of
the Third International Conference on Landlocked Developing
Countries**

**Civil Society Forum
Third International Conference on Landlocked Developing
Countries**

**Building 3-08.01
Monday, 4 August 2025
11:00–11:30**

Amb. Lok Bahadur Thapa, President of ECOSOC

Excellencies,

Distinguished Members of Civil Society,

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you to this historic first-ever Civil Society Forum for Landlocked Developing Countries.

Your presence here today is a strong testament to your unwavering commitment to the people of the 32 LLDCs, and to the shared ambition of realizing the goals of the Awaza Programme of Action. You bring with you the voices, hopes, and aspirations of the 600 million people in LLDCs.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Turkmenistan for their leadership and the generous hospitality extended to us in Awaza.

As the UN Secretary-General often reminds us, civil society serves as a vital bridge between people and their representatives.

Nowhere is that bridge more essential than where the gaps are the widest.

Dear Colleagues,

The 32 LLDCs face development challenges that run deep. While geography plays a role, the constraints go far beyond.

These countries grapple with structural and systematic barriers that severely limit their integration into the global economy.

Consider this:

- **Trade costs for LLDCs are up to 30% higher than those of coastal countries.**
- **Nearly one-third of their population live in poverty - almost triple the global average.**
- **Internet access remains at just 39%, compared to 67% globally.**

These are not just statistics. They reveal deep, systemic constraints that limit connectivity, opportunity, and resilience.

The Awaza Programme of Action (APOA) provides a transformative roadmap to address these challenges. It calls for urgent and collective action to unleash the potential of LLDCs. And it rightly recognizes civil society as a key partner in driving this transformation.

As you begin your discussions today, let me share five reflections on how civil society can drive this change.

First – civil society is uniquely positioned to build coalitions across borders.

The challenges that LLDCs face are transnational. Therefore, our responses must also be equally so. I encourage you to forge partnerships across regions, sectors, and issues.

Whether in community town halls or multilateral fora, your voices must amplify LLDC priorities and ensure that solutions are inclusive and people centered.

The APOA calls for a reinvigorated global partnership based on inclusive, multi-stakeholder coalitions.

Second – resilience must be built from the ground up.

Your deep ties to your communities makes you instrumental in developing local solutions to global crises – be it climate change, food security, or economic shocks.

From early-warning networks to seed banks, and social-protection schemes, your work can help integrate the APOA's disaster-risk-informed approach to development.

Third – closing the digital divide is critical.

Digital connectivity can be a powerful equalizer, but only if it is accessible and inclusive.

CSOs have a critical role to play in promoting affordable connectivity, building digital skills, infrastructure, and supporting marginalized groups, including women, youth, and rural populations.

Fourth – your role as champions of fair and inclusive trade is crucial.

You are so often the voice of small enterprises and entrepreneurs who represent the backbone of the LLDC economies.

In that role, you can champion policies that ensure fair trade and regional partnerships - and making sure that benefits reach the grassroots level.

Civil society can indeed support trade facilitation, enhance transparency in regional agreements, and push for the strengthened supply chains.

In short, your engagement can help bring the APOA's crucial trade facilitation commitments to life.

Finally - civil society's role in promoting accountability is indispensable.

You can play a vital role in monitoring the implementation of the Awaza Programme of Action - tracking progress, identifying gaps, and ensuring promises lead to real outcomes.

Through data, advocacy, and participatory assessments, you can bring to the fore the voices and insights of those who often go unheard.

Dear Colleagues,

This Forum meets at a pivotal moment.

The Pact for the Future put civil-society action at the heart of fair, resilient societies - while the recent Fourth Financing for Development Conference mapped a more inclusive global financial architecture for the world's most vulnerable nations.

Let us build on these foundations.

Let this Forum not be an endpoint, but the beginning of a new era of partnership, action, and accountability.

I look forward to your **declaration/call to action, which will provide an invaluable perspective of civil society's position, priorities and commitments.**

Let us work together to turn the APOA from a set of commitments on paper, to a pathway to prosperity for the 600 million people in LLDCs.

Let us shape a future in which LLDCs are defined not by their geography, but by their resilience, ambition, and achievements.

I thank you.