

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Keynote Remarks at Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of
Landlocked Developing Countries (as prepared for delivery)

Theme: Partnering for accelerated implementation of the VPoA and
achieving sustainable development in LLDCs in the era of COVID-19

Republic of Kazakhstan, Global Chair of the Group of LLDCs
23 September 2020, 07.00-10.00 PM [Bangkok time]
[Interprefy virtual platform]

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014-2024 (VPoA) symbolizes the aspirations of the LLDCs on their path towards sustainable development by 2030.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been considerable negative impacts on more than 167 million people in the 12 LLDCs of the Asia-Pacific region, including:

- Surges in additional costs due to connectivity restrictions,
- a 7 per cent increase in trade costs, and
- a 10 to 15 per cent decrease in trade volumes, with severe disruptions in service sectors.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must identify strategic directions to mitigate socio-economic impacts as well as recover better from this crisis.

First, let us focus on sustainable regional connectivity. Member States can promote an integrated multimodal operation, with a focus on greater digitalization in connectivity sectors.

Strengthening of domestic regulatory policies and institutional changes is key for ensuing partnerships with transit countries through subregional and regional connectivity processes.

Second, we must facilitate seamless trade. Governments are continuously undertaking robust measures to mitigate border closures by introducing public health protocols.

To minimize physical contact, governments can expand cross-border trade digitalization and standardization policies as well as quarantine procedures to build the confidence necessary to ensure trade flows.

Third, structural economic transformation must remain a priority. Though there is a risk of setback or a pause, the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity for economies to transition towards modern service sectors.

Sustainable financing, human capital development and technology-driven policies including digitization remain critical policy drivers.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

To facilitate the three strategic directions, ESCAP is working with member States and all stakeholders together.

With the established regional collaborative mechanisms on transport cooperation along the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Network, member States can stimulate the development of smart, resilient and more environmentally sustainable transport.

Digital, resilient and decarbonized are three guiding principles to build back better for regional connectivity.

The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific can help reduce trade costs.

The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative is uniquely suited in finding solutions and approaches for seamless regional digital connectivity.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need a common vision, shared responsibility and solidarity for a full and timely implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs and sustainable development in this historic moment.

Thank you very much.