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Statement by

Under-Secretary-General

Ms. Rabab Fatima

High Representative

**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small
Island Developing States**

**at the Annual Ministerial Meeting
of the Group of LLDCs**

Held under the Theme

***“Accelerating implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the aftermath of
the COVID-19 pandemic and building momentum towards the Third United Nations
Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries”***

22 September 2022, 10.00 AM – 01.00 PM

ECOSOC CHAMBER

- Honourable Dr. Lemogang Kwape, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Botswana and Global Chair of the Group of LLDCs,
- H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, President of the UN General Assembly,
- H.E. Excellency Lachezara Stoeva, of the Economic and Social Council,
- H.E. Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General
- Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues

I am honoured to have the opportunity to address this meeting and I thank you, Hon'ble Minister, for the kind invitation.

I congratulate you on the assumption of the Chairmanship of the Group of LLDCs.

And I wish to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile for his excellent stewardship of the Group here in New York.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Kazakhstan for its outstanding leadership of the Group through a challenging period.

I am very pleased to see the large presence today of representatives of transit countries and of the development partners here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for setting the tone for our meeting today. It was really heartening to hear about your priorities. We are also greatly encouraged by the strong support expressed by the President of the General Assembly and President of ECOSOC and Second Committee Chair for this Group, and in preparing for the Third LLDC Conference.

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has set back progress on sustainable development in the LLDCs. Weak and slow recovery from the pandemic has been hampered by the current food crisis, rising energy costs, and acute shortage of development financing.

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

On this note, Mr. Chairman, I would like to present an overview of the progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs as highlighted in this year's report of the Secretary General.

Excellencies,

Poverty is on the rise in the LLDCs, with 25 per cent of the population living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per day.

Unemployment has increased from 4.6 per cent in 2015 to 5.7 per cent in 2021.

Food security remains a challenge.

LLDCs' external debt has increased significantly. Currently, nine LLDCs are at a high risk of debt distress, and two are in debt distress.

Transport infrastructure and maintenance remains inadequate.

Internet usage rate in LLDCs was only 34.7 per cent in 2021, far below the world average of 63 per cent.

Crucially, LLDCs remain marginalized from global trade. And COVID-19 related travel restrictions are further compounding the situation.

The VPoA's objective of significantly increasing LLDCs' participation in global trade remains largely unmet. And LLDC exports are also largely undiversified.

These are significant challenges, and the list is not exhaustive.

But, there is also progress to report.

The proportion of the population with access to electricity has increased.

So has Official Development Assistance to LLDCs.

This rose significantly in 2020, to \$37.2 billion, from \$32.5 billion in 2019.

Foreign direct investment flows to LLDCs increased by 31 per cent, from \$14.1 billion in 2020 to \$18.5 billion in 2021.

And in 2021, landlocked developing countries received \$40.8 billion in remittances, an increase of 8.8 per cent from 2020.

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

This is progress. But not progress enough.

Achieving the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining two years is a huge challenge.

We would need whole-hearted efforts and innovative ideas and approaches.

And we need the collective efforts and will of all stakeholders - LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, the UN System and the private sector.

The upcoming Third UN Conference on LLDCs in 2024 offers us an important opportunity.

To build back better. To learn from a decade of stunted progress, to make sure the next decade is one of delivery.

The LLDCs cannot do it alone. We need new partnerships to forge a new path to prosperity.

There is a need to increase ODA including Aid for Trade to LLDCs, and fairer access to that support. ODA is currently concentrated in too few LLDCs.

The role of the United Nations in supporting the LLDCs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is fundamental. And I am fully aware of the responsibility of my office to mobilize the whole system in your support.

The Roadmap for Accelerated implementation of the VPoA, adopted by this meeting two years ago, is helping us in this mission.

It contains more than 430 initiatives being implemented in LLDCs, covering the six priority areas of the VPoA.

The most recent update showed that about a quarter of the activities in the Roadmap have been reported as completed.

Completed activities have resulted in:

- strengthening LLDCs' capacities, and increasing knowledge on:
- transit, trade and infrastructure development;
- energy and ICT;
- structural economic transformation;
- cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries;

- and climate change, among so many other issues.

We recognize that more still remains to be done.

The role of transit countries remains vital.

And the decision by the WTO to convene an annual dedicated session focusing on transit is an important opportunity.

My office, in close collaboration with the UN Development Cooperation Office, - has recently established the LLDCs National Focal Points network.

This will assist with national level implementation of global agreements in line with your priorities, which can often be a challenge.

The National Focal Points can help bring much needed coherence and coordination at all levels.

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

Looking ahead, a top priority for my Office is to work on the preparatory process of the Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries.

The process will include regional review meetings, national level reviews, pre-conference thematic events and substantive work and reports.

The recent Ministerial Transport Conference of LLDCs held in Turkmenistan, is an important example of preparatory work, and there will be many more as we move towards the Third Conference.

I want to emphasize that national level experiences will serve as the foundation of the next programme of action.

I therefore encourage you to prepare national reports that comprehensively assess implementation.

During the recent meeting of the Group at Ambassadorial level, we agreed on the need to work closely with development partners.

And in this regard, I welcome the decision made by the Group to reactivate the Group of Friends of LLDCs. I also thank you Mr. Chair for underlining the need to mobilize resources for the Trust Fund, and in this regard, greatly appreciate the announcement of your government's contribution to the Trust Fund.

Before I conclude, allow me to highlight some of the upcoming meetings and events organized by my Office.

In collaboration with the Chair and the International Think Tank for LLDCs, we are organizing an LLDC dedicated session during the WTO Public Forum. This will take place on 29 September and will focus on "Enhancing integration of LLDCs into global trade for sustainable COVID-19 recovery: The role of digital technology".

We also plan to organize an Inter-Agency Consultative Group Meeting on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action later in the year.

And we shall continue to undertake analytical work in support of advocacy and capacity-building activities for the LLDCs.

I want to assure you that we will continue to amplify your voice and highlight your challenges and priorities at every opportunity, including at the relevant intergovernmental processes, and UN system-wide coordination mechanisms.

We will work closely with you as we approach several global meetings important to LLDCs, to be held in 2022 and 2023. This includes COP27, in November – and the 5th UN Conference on LDCs to be held in March 2023 to be held in Doha.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to bring to your attention the ongoing negotiations on the international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I would like to encourage you to fully engage in these discussions to ensure that the interests of the LLDCs in the ocean economy are secured.

LLDCs, should not be left behind in the exploitation of the resources regarded as common heritage to mankind.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm my personal commitment, and that of my Office, to continue to support the Chair, the Bureau and the Group to generate stronger global partnerships for the LLDCs.

I thank you.