



**Report of the High-level Midterm Review on the Implementation of
the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing
Countries for the Decade 2014-2024**

**Held on 5 and 6 December 2019 at the United Nations Headquarters
in New York**

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Summary

1. On 5th and 6th December 2019, Ministers and high-level representatives from Member States, United Nations system, other international and regional organizations, private sector and civil society met to undertake a comprehensive review of the progress achieved in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, identify challenges and recommendations of actions that need to be done in the remaining 5 years. In their assessment, participants noted that mixed progress has been made on the priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action. While some tangible progress had been made, participants noted that there were still major gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. The High-level Midterm Review adopted Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The Political Declaration welcomed progress made by LLDCs since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action, highlighted the major challenges faced and concludes with a call for action on targeted and accelerated measures by LLDCs and development partners to fully achieve the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining five years.

2. The meeting noted that progress has been recorded by LLDCs on fundamental transit policy issues priority area. Notable achievements that were highlighted by participants include the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement that entered into force in May 2019; the Lapis Lazuli trade and transit agreement signed between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia in 2017; the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal initiative established in 2015 to strengthen economic cooperation and trade connectivity; the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport between Russia, China and Mongolia, which entered into force in September 2018; the agreement by China, Mongolia and Russian Federation on an economic corridor; the Eurasian Economic Union that came into force on 1 January 2015 among many.

3. On the priority area on infrastructure development and maintenance, participants noted that LLDCs with their transit partners, have made important gains in upgrading railways, roads, ports, air transport and inland waterways, as well as building and utilizing corridors. Some of the examples that were highlighted include the current construction of the Kazungula Bridge between Botswana and Zambia which is a joint project between the two countries; the north-south railway corridor connecting Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan that was officially inaugurated in 2014; the 756km Ethiopia - Djibouti Standard Gauge Railway commissioned in October 2016; construction of the railroad corridor Mazari-Sharif- Herat and a highway from Mazari-Sharif through Kabul to facilitate trade between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan; the construction of the Murtinho bridge which will allow East-West connection from Brazil through Paraguay to the Pacific; the joint railway project Dar es Salaam-Isaka-Kigali Standard Gauge Railway between Rwanda and Tanzania along the Central Corridor whose studies were completed, now in Financing/Resource mobilization phase; India, Afghanistan and Iran are cooperating in the development of the Chahbahar Port and working on the International North-South Transport Corridor; Afghanistan recently opened air corridors with India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia; and plans on the bio-oceanic railway corridor to be built in Latina America.

4. The meeting also highlighted some progress that has been made in establishing dry ports and logistics centers. In 2016, Uzbekistan established an international logistical center Termez-Cargo

Center terminal at the border with Afghanistan which is set to assist increasing export import and transit cargo flow. Khorgos, an international dry port that connects land-locked Kazakhstan to the sea port in China was built and the Aktau port on the Caspian Sea was modernized.

5. Participants also highlighted the progress that their countries made to improve energy and ICT connectivity of the LLDCs. Examples include: commissioning of a 54 megawatts solar power plant in Zambia; construction of the Rusumo 81MW Hydro power project between Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania that started in 2017; the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, known as CASA-1000, initiated in 2016 that would help make the most efficient use of clean hydropower resources in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan; The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI) natural gas pipeline project also aimed at increasing energy access to Afghanistan. On digital connectivity, Kazakhstan indicated that implementation of a national programme, “Digital Kazakhstan,” is aimed at improving the quality of life. Reference was made to Smart Africa initiative which is bringing together more than 20 African governments, the private sector and international organizations to promote and ensure affordable access to broadband and ICT connectivity.

6. On international trade, the Meeting noted that Tajikistan and Kazakhstan became full-fledged members of WTO during the review period. The Meeting underscored that the high ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by LLDCs and transit countries signifies a key achievement that will benefit the LLDCs through improvements in transit time when the Agreement is fully implemented. Countries highlighted the trade facilitation measures that they had adopted. A Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking system that serves Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda was launched in 2017 and had resulted in reduced transit time from 6 to 3 days for regional, and 3 to 1.5 days for national transactions, improved truck turnaround time from 4 to 8 trips a month and suppressed transit diversion and improved trade facilitation. Many LLDCs and their transit neighbors had established One Stop Border Posts that are yielding good results. Some LLDCs had established single windows.

7. On regional integration, the meeting noted the progress that had been made including: establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area; Afghanistan had worked with its neighbors to solidify Afghanistan as a regional hub for transit, trade and connectivity over the past three years; and the key role played by China’s Belt and Road Initiative in enhancing regional integration. On structural economic transformation, participants highlighted the efforts made to diversify and upgrade their economies, enhance export promotion and private sector development. LLDCs have adopted strategies for diversification and upgrading of their economies, industrialization, export promotion and private sector development.

8. On means of implementation and partnerships the meeting noted that there was some increase in ODA support to LLDCs over the review period. Development partners highlighted the efforts that they had made to support the LLDCs on a bi-lateral level. Many partner countries highlighted the support that they will provide under South-South cooperation. For example, China indicated that under the Belt and Road Initiative, it will continue to support efforts in infrastructure, trade, digital industry and energy and other areas. India indicated that in the spirit of South-South cooperation, it launched the \$150 million India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund,

which aims to drive transformational projects and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals in least developed and landlocked developing countries.

9. Despite this progress that has been made in the priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action, the meeting underscored that there are many challenges that continue to impede progress that must be addressed with urgency. Participants pointed out that LLDCs continue to be marginalized from global trade, as their share of global merchandise exports declined to below 1 per cent in 2018. LLDCs have struggled with adding value to their exports as most of them are still dependent on exports of primary commodities, leaving them vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations. LLDCs have made limited progress towards enhancing their manufacturing and industrial capacity, and the economies of some LLDCs even showed signs of de-industrialization. They also noted that although ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement was high, its implementation by LLDCs and transit countries was lagging behind and there was need to build their capacity to better implement the agreement.

10. Participants noted that the climate crisis is also having major impacts on LLDCs with many heavily affected by desertification, biodiversity loss, drought and receding glaciers. Although progress had been made on infrastructure development, there were still missing links in both road and rail infrastructure and of concern, is that more than 40 per cent of the population of LLDCs still did not have access to electricity and the rural-urban gap remains significant. Participants were concerned that foreign direct investment to LLDCs had continued to decline.

11. As way forward, participants identified a number of key priority areas for implementation and most were highlighted in the call for action of the Political Declaration of the Midterm Review. These include: the criticality of infrastructure connectivity, including transport, ICT and energy for LLDCs; building climate and disaster-resilient transport infrastructure; the importance of full implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement; strengthened regional integration and cooperation amongst LLDCs and between LLDCs and transit countries as key to address the challenges of landlockedness; structural economic transformation and productive capacity building including diversifying export structures and value-added exports; intensify industrialization in the LLDCs through linkages with regional value and global value chains, and enhance intra-regional trade, and special economic zones; greater utilization of technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, big data, digitalization and renewable energy technologies for the benefit of LLDCs; need for enhanced financial resource mobilization; building enabling environments for private sector development as well as strengthening foreign direct investment and domestic capital markets; strengthening climate change resilience and response of LLDCs; the need to address conflict; ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and geopolitical uncertainties that threaten to stall progress on regional initiatives.

12. The UN System and other relevant international and regional organizations were specifically called upon to provide and or strengthen their support to LLDCs in a number of these areas. The meeting concluded by proposing durable, transparent, accountable and effective partnerships between LLDCs, transit countries and their development partners.

I. Introduction

13. In resolutions 72/232 and 73/243 the United Nations General Assembly decided to convene in 2019 a comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked developing countries¹ (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014-2024 (VPoA) as 2 days of high-level plenary meetings of the General Assembly to be chaired by the President of the Assembly. The Assembly stressed that the midterm review shall review progress made by LLDCs, transit countries and development partners in the implementation of the VPoA and shall share best practices and lessons learned, identify obstacles and constraints encountered and actions and initiatives needed to overcome them, as well as new challenges and emerging issues, in order to further accelerate the implementation of the VPoA.

14. On the 5th and 6th December 2019, the President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande chaired the high-level plenary meetings of the High-level Midterm Review on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

15. Member States adopted the Political Declaration of the High-level Midterm Review on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, at the outset of a two-day General Assembly gathering to address these nations' special needs and challenges and to promote strong partnerships with neighbors.

II. Attendance

16. The meeting was attended by High-level representatives including Ministers and senior officials from 146 member states, representatives from United Nations systems, international and regional organizations, UN observers, and civil society also attended. The full list of countries and organizations that attended is presented in annex 2.

III. Opening Session

17. The opening session included remarks by H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the UN General Assembly and H.E. Mr. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

18. The President of the UN General Assembly highlighted that the Political Declaration is testament to the strength of multilateralism and aligns the Vienna Programme of Action with the Sustainable Development Goals. He noted that LLDCs are at risk of being left behind, noting that many of these countries are below the range of high human development according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and one third of their populations live in extreme poverty and many of these nations continue to struggle in the shadows of historical injustices. Landlocked developing countries are at risk of being left behind, and their development

¹ Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mongolia, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

is restricted by its vulnerability to climate emergency, undernourishment, and infrastructure deficiency, amongst others. Just nine months ago the landlocked States of Malawi and Zimbabwe were impacted by Cyclone Idai, despite being many miles from the sea. Undernourishment in these countries reached an alarming rate of 23.2 per cent in 2016, and food insecurity affects more than half of their populations. Forty per cent of their populations also do not have access to electricity. He stressed that the digital divide should not be allowed to deepen.

19. While underscoring progress in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, he stressed that more remains to be done particularly in implementing targets outlined in the Political Declaration. This includes taking action to remove all legal, social and economic barriers to achieve gender equality. It also includes combating illicit financial flows, strengthening trade financing for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and improving economic governance and business regulations and trade facilitation programmes.

20. Mr. Tijiani called on all member states to jointly commit to Political Declaration and implement the Vienna Programme of Action in a timely and effective manner.

21. **H.E. Mr. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General** stressed the importance of enhancing cooperation among transit countries and development partners to overcome the challenges of being landlocked. He called for closer cooperation on right policy mix, increased investment, reliable transit infrastructure, efficient customs operations and improved access and use of technology.

22. Mr. Guterres stated that Vienna Programme of Action as cooperation framework, provides win-win solution for landlocked developing countries, transit countries and development partners. He shared that headway has been made on the Vienna Programme of Action, including an increased gross domestic product (GPD) per capita in many landlocked developing countries, and encouraging progress has been recorded on some indicators related to health, education, energy, gender equality and information and communication technology (ICT), but there are challenges to be addressed. Specifically, trade integration remains low, LLDCs accounts for less than 1% of the global exports and more than 80% of exports are commodity and natural resources; infrastructure remains inadequate; foreign direct investment continues to decline. These challenges are even more urgent for 17 landlocked least developed countries who are heavily dependent on ODA, making it crucial for that aid to be increased and predictable.

23. Mr. Guterres highlighted that the midterm review can forge greater coherence and synergy with the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and other relevant international frameworks calling on development partners to work together to mobilize domestic and external resources and direct them to high priority areas. He underscored significance of innovative financing for infrastructure, technical assistance, capacity building support, national statistical system for business development. He underscored that the Declaration to be adopted calls on us to help turn landlocked developing countries into land-linked places of prosperity and opportunity. At the end of his remarks, Mr. Guterres called for solidarity to help the world's 32 landlocked developing countries achieve sustainable transformations and better standard of living. The United Nations system, reformed and repositioned, remains strongly committed to supporting these efforts, he said.

IV. Adoption of the Political Declaration

24. The Assembly adopted the Political Declaration without a vote.

V. General Debate

25. **H.E. Dr. Riyad Mansour, Chair of Group of 77, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine**, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, highlighted that the midterm review is a crucial time for landlocked developing countries to review their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action, more importantly, to map way forward to accelerate the implementation. Five years after the adoption of the action programme, the 32 landlocked developing countries still face special challenges due to geographical remoteness, lack of access to the sea and isolation from world markets. Exacerbating the situation are inadequate infrastructure, cumbersome border-crossing procedures, structural deficiencies and limited capacities to deal with external shocks. Currently, one third of the population of landlocked developing countries live in poverty, he said, expressing concern that such States account for less than one per cent of global exports, with many experiencing persistent trade deficits. Many landlocked developing countries must also deal with the impacts of climate change, desertification and land degradation, he added.

26. Dr. Mansour called on all landlocked developing countries, transit countries, development partners and the United Nation System to redoubled efforts to implement the Political Declaration and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 in a coordinated, coherent and expeditious manner.

27. **H.E. Mr. Manqoba Bheki Khumalo, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade of Eswatini**, highlighted that Eswatini prioritized international trade, infrastructure development, regional integration, transit issues and resource mobilization in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action. Eswatini's strategic roadmap (2019-2022) identifies further challenges it faces, including a widening fiscal deficit, declining growth rate and low business ease ranking. The country's membership in different regional economic communities' places it in a key position to address transit bottlenecks impeding the movement of goods and services across frontiers, he noted. The move towards liberalization of services in various organizations will be fundamental in enhancing interconnectivity, which remains an obstacle for Eswatini.

28. Minister Khumalo stressed that, the Government of Eswatini has put great emphasis on trade facilitation, including current development and designation of two Special Economic Zones around international airport and Science Technology Park, and adoption of Eswatini National Trade Facilitation Roadmap, in order to increase exports to GDP by 5%. He also pinpointed seven strategic initiatives to fully implement the Roadmap, including Trade Facilitation Institutional Agreements, Trade Information Portal, Trade Facilitation Performance Measurement Systems, Compliance and Risk Management, Customs to Customs Cooperation, National Single Window and Regional Integration. Mr. Khumalo concluded that Eswatini will continue on its obligation to implement the Vienna Programme of Action, and technical and financial support remain critical for the further implementation of this programme.

29. **H.E. Mr. Ralph Pachalo Jooma, MP, Minister of Transport and Republic Works of the Republic of Malawi**, underscored progress that Malawi has made since the government mainstreamed VPoA and SDGs in their National Strategy. While Malawi quickly mainstreamed the Programme of Action into national plans, the lack of resources continues to challenge implementation, he said. He indicated that Malawi is currently implementing a number of infrastructure projects in Transport, Energy and ICT as well as creating an enabling environment for private Sector Development. Highlighting regional opportunities aimed at attaining the ambitions of the Vienna action programme, he reported that the Programme for Infrastructure Development for Africa and the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme are continental initiatives to improve transit corridors and simplify rules and regulations.

30. **H.E. Mr. Jens Frølich Holte, State Secretary of Norway**, speaking on behalf of Nordic Countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway, observed that one third of the population of landlocked developing countries live in extreme poverty. He reiterated that Nordic countries recognize the challenges of being landlocked. and called development partners to increase financing to LLDCs, especially in climate risk mitigation and disaster risk mitigation areas. He noted that some trade corridors in Africa including the Trans-Kalahari corridor, have achieved the objectives set out in the Vienna program of action on improving transit conditions. He welcomed progress in attracting private investments and developing public-private partnerships to help generate additional national funds and reaffirmed that trade facilitation is key to assisting landlocked development states. He shared that Norway is continuously making progress on helping LLDCs to overcome bottlenecks of trade development. He noted that trade facilitation programs can play an important role in assisting landlocked developing states in increasing their level of trade and are of great importance to the Nordic countries. Norway is the biggest single donor to the Trade Facilitation Support Program of the World Bank.

31. **H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan** shared Kazakhstan's achievements and challenges in the implementation of the VPoA priority areas. On Fundamental Transit Policy issues, Kazakhstan has made achievement in WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), UNECE TIR Convention and the launch of the World Customs Organization's transit guidelines. On Connectivity and Transport Infrastructure Development area, Kazakhstan has made significant progress in developing Eurasian multimodal transit-transport hub and enhancing transport infrastructure, including rail, road, air and waterways. Kazakhstan is implementing national infrastructure programme "Nurly Zhol" to strengthen Eurasian integration and key role in China's Belt and Road Initiative. Additionally, Kazakhstan focuses on enhancing digital and energy connectivity and increasing access to ICT. As part of this programme, Kazakhstan has built more than 2,500 kilometres of railroad, reconstructed 12,000 kilometres of highways, opened the Western Europe-Western China automobile transit corridor and built the Khorgos Gateway dry port on the border with China, and modernized the Aktau port on the Caspian Sea. Today, Kazakhstan's 11 international transit corridors - 5 railway and 6 automobile - let goods move from Europe to Asia much faster than by sea and more cheaply than by air transport.

32. Landlocked developing countries have made significant progress in enhancing digital and energy connectivity, another key priority. The country is implementing a national programme,

“Digital Kazakhstan,” to improve the quality of life by progressively developing its digital ecosystem. The introduction of ICT solutions for e-commerce has opened up new horizons for the landlocked developing countries. Despite their efforts, these countries still experience difficulties in diversifying their export structures and enhancing trade capacities, he continued. Mr. Ashikbayev outlined joint efforts to make in the next five years, namely, develop and upgrade international transport and transit corridors, streamline border-crossing procedure, facilitate small and medium sized enterprises and make affordable access to ICT. He underscored that financing resource is another main obstacle for LLDCs and they should fully utilize funding resources from New Silk Road Fund, BRI and World Bank to further implement the VPoA.

33. Deputy Foreign Minister noted that as global chair of the LLDCs for 2020-2021, Kazakhstan envisions building close cooperation with the United Nations system and other relevant organizations, financial institutions, development partners and transit countries, to forge coherence in achieving the goals of the Vienna Programme of Action. As a firm supporter of the multilateral trading system, Kazakhstan will host the twelfth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in its capital, Nur-Sultan, in June 2020. Kazakhstan also plans to host an LLDC ministerial meeting in the margins of that conference and urged all Member States to use these meetings to discuss the critical issues facing such countries.

34. **H.E. Mr. Viengsavath Siphandone, the Vice Minister of Public Works and Transport of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic** remarked that the Lao PDR has made significant development progress by integrating the Vienna Programme of Action into national development plan and strategy. He noted that in Lao PDR government has invested in transportation infrastructure and service, especially efficient transportation system for transit routes and cross border transport. Specifically, progress includes construction of bridges connecting with Thailand and Myanmar and the introduction of six main railway projects under the Railway Strategic Plan for the year 2016 - 2030, including the Laos - China railway cooperation under the Belt and Road initiative.

35. The Vice Minister noted that on international trade and trade facilitation area, Lao’s policy was largely shaped by bilateral, regional and international trade agreement with ASEAN Free Trade Area and WTO. Domestically, Lao PDR government established National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in 2018 to supervise and facilitate trade and business operation. He highlighted several challenges in implementing the VPoA, that include: financial constraints, inadequate logistics facilities, cumbersome customs, low productive capacity and technology, insufficient human resources and limited export diversification. Further implementation of the VPoA in the next 5 years requires closer work with international community.

36. **H.E. Ms. Shoista Saidmurodzoda, the Deputy Minister of Transport of the Republic of Tajikistan** stressed that freedom of transit along with infrastructure and logistics provision for transport in order to have access to sea to maritime ports is crucial to the development of her country. She highlighted that Tajikistan had ratified nine international conventions and in 2014, the country became a full-fledged member of WTO, the rules of which provide freedom of transit in order to ease export, import and transit operation. She stressed that in 2019, the project for trade portal was being pursued and the idea of stepping up institutional capacities, and trade are reflected in National Strategy for 2030. The goal of the document is to develop transport and infrastructure

and tremendous work has been undertaken. She noted that Tajikistan has allocated \$2 million national funds for infrastructure improvement along its borders to renovate and rebuild roads and also bridges, six of which are of regional significance and border with Afghanistan. She emphasized that eleven state investment projects for transit and transport infrastructure are being developed and foreign investment is being sought.

37. Ms. Saidmurodzoda indicated that the state investments have led to increase in trade and reduction in time for travel from ten hours to four to five hours. She emphasized that these efforts have led to results such as GDP annual growth rate of seven percent, increase in amount of export and greater regional trade. She noted that Tajikistan placed education at the heart of National Development Plan. She highlighted that National Strategies reflected industrialization as the fourth priority for economic development. She concluded by mentioning donor involvement and stressing that Tajikistan has open door policies and is ready to cooperate.

38. and less time to travel across national lines. Ms. Saidmurodzoda noted that Tajikistan has placed education at the heart of national development plan, given the importance of greater regional trade and multilateral framework agreements.

39. **H.E. Mr. Hissein Tahir Sougoumi, the Secretary of State for Economy and Planning of Development of the Republic of Chad** highlighted the achievements that Chad has made on infrastructure development, through bilateral initiatives and sub-regional initiatives, enhancing road and railway connection in the Africa region. He gave examples of projects to include the extension of the Cameroonian and Sudanese railways to Chad, different Sahel infrastructure projects and the Trans-Saharan road project. With regard to trade facilitation he noted that the country had adopted since 2014 measures aimed at the modernization of the Tax and Customs Administration, for example the migration project to SYDONIA World financed by the World Bank; development of the investment policy with technical support of UNCTAD, and the development of the Master Plan of Industrialization and Diversification with the support of UN ECA. The main objective of the Master Plan is to establish an industrialization of the economy allowing the country to emerge from the dependence on petroleum from one part, and on the other to diversify the production structure to best respond to the vulnerability of an economy dominated by a mono production and to move irreversibly towards a diversified economy driven by manufactured goods.

40. The Secretary of State noted that within the regional economic program of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC), Heads of State, at the Extraordinary Summit of CEMAC held in Yaounde on November 24, 2019, identified several priority projects among which, the connectivity of Chadian border towns to the electrical network of Cameroon and the fiber optic project to reduce the cost of communications, telephone and internet. He noted that advances have been recorded with the effectiveness of the free movement of people in the CEMAC zone and the entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Area. He however noted that despite these advances, much remains to be done to address challenges in particular the persistence of conflicts in their immediate vicinity including insecurity caused by Boko Haram terrorist attacks continues to have very negative repercussions on the whole of the Chadian economy. All the exports and imports with the key trade partners including Nigeria, Libya and CAR are affected, causing a huge shortfall. He also noted that the stagnation in recent years in the improvement of infrastructure for

transport, the extension of the main markets, inefficient logistics systems and charges of all kinds taken from the main transport corridor road haulers are persistent difficulties hampering trade flows with outside partners. Mr. Sougoumi stressed that it is critical to support sustainable development for LLDCs like Chad and called for more bilateral and multilateral cooperation with both public and private sectors to achieve sustainable development goals.

41. **H.E. Mr. Julio Cesar Arriola Ramirez, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Paraguay and Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries** noted that some progress has been made in indicators related to health and education, and in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as in access to drinking water. He indicated that increased progress has been seen in the information and communications technologies, and that regional integration has been strengthened. He underscored that there was significant progress in ratifying the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and other relevant instruments on transport and transit at the regional and global levels. He noted that despite the collective efforts, the progress achieved is not sufficient to meet the objectives of the Vienna Program of Action. Specifically, participation of landlocked developing countries to the global export has decreased, economy diversification and vulnerability to climate change have not been improved and large proportion of population still lives in extreme poverty. The annual GDP of LLDCs has shrunk, and their human development indexes have remained below the global average. He stressed that this is the time for all to unite efforts through effective partnerships, turning geographic disadvantage into an opportunity for interconnection with the world and leaving no one behind. He called on all stakeholders to implement the call to action and accelerate the execution of the Vienna Programme.

42. **H.E. Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations** noted that LLDCs face specific vulnerabilities that include: vulnerability to the effects of climate change, lack of access to the sea, remoteness and isolation from world markets, and high transit costs and risks that impose serious constraints to their development, often preventing them from reaping full benefit from the trade and investment opportunities created by globalization. He noted that the LLDCs require more resources to support their development and the EU provides ODA. He stressed that it is crucial that LLDCs develop a strategic vision of how they plan to finance their sustainable development objectives and, in this regard, the EU is working with the United Nations in helping interested countries develop Integrated National Financing Frameworks. Integrated National Financing Frameworks bring together the different elements of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda at country level, while also facilitating nationally-owned and government-led implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. They lay out a financing strategy, helping governments prioritize actions manage risks, and make the most of diverse financing sources.

43. Mr. Gonzato underscored that trade infrastructure is crucial for the growth performance of LLDCs. He however pointed out that existing gaps in infrastructure networks and sector inefficiencies hinder economic growth and that investment into transport is needed to enhance connectivity. He stressed that the EU remains focused on making better use of all means of implementation - including capacity-building and mobilizing more domestic resources and private investment. He shared that the EU initiated the External Investment Plan for Africa and European neighborhood, which aims to generate up to 44 billion euros of new investment - in sectors with the greatest potential to drive decent jobs and growth - from sustainable cities and agriculture, to

energy, transport and digital infrastructure. He indicated that the EU also works on sustainable finance to help investors identify and seize environmentally sustainable investment opportunities, thereby connecting global finance with local financing needs. The EU supports countries in addressing the hurdles that prevent them from accessing international global markets and attracting investments, including by building pipelines of bankable projects. The EIP supports the improvement of the investment climate and facilitates public-private dialogue.

44. Mr. Gonzato also noted that the EU is committed to promoting the LLDCs' integration into the multilateral trading system by providing support to trade facilitation through the Aid for Trade Strategy. The EU supports regional cooperation efforts and welcomes the creation of networks of regional renewable energy as energy dependency is a major source of economic vulnerability and a key concern for many LLDCs. He stressed that the EU believes that economic development must be combined with protection of the environment, which helps ensure achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Goal of the Paris Agreement.

45. **H.E. Mr. Kinga Singye, the Foreign Secretary of Royal Government of Bhutan** shared that Bhutan has made significant progress over the last five years, including on enhanced social development through reduction of both income and multidimensional poverty, and improved infrastructure for access and connectivity. He noted that and if all goes well, Bhutan will graduate from the “least developed country” category in 2023. However, significant constraints remain, such as being landlocked with a small population, limited economic diversification, high costs of trade, and limited regional and international market, he said. He noted that for Bhutan, structural economic transformation and productive capacity building including through skills development are key national priorities in achieving the VPoA. He stressed that there was need to expand investment into tourism, organic agriculture, and cottage and small industries, and establish an entrepreneurship ecosystem to provide a platform for innovation to generate jobs with the participation of corporate and private sectors.

46. He indicated that in line with their national objective of self-reliance, domestic resource mobilization is being accorded high priority. As a result of prudent fiscal management, the country is currently able to finance up to 64% of its development expenditure through domestic revenue. He shared that Bhutan is also implementing the Bhutan for Life program, an innovative green financing mechanism to augment its resource requirements for conservation of the environment. He requested development partners to help Bhutan to build capacity in science, technology and innovation as well as in e-commerce readiness and local capability building. He noted that Bhutan will continue its efforts to strengthen regional and international partnerships through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, particularly in exchanging best practices and technical assistance.

47. **H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations** highlighted that many of the challenges related to landlockedness can be successfully overcome with the support of development partners. He indicated that Austrian Official Development Assistance to LLDCs in 2017 amounted to Euro 42.7 million. He indicated that half of Austria's priority countries fall under the LLDC category. Austria has allocated additional humanitarian funds totaling 1.4 million euros to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, where situations of conflict exacerbated by the impact of climate change to create dire needs. He highlighted that regional

cooperation and integration are critical in addressing the challenges of being landlocked, pointing out that Austria is an industrial country with a small domestic market and as such, depends on its export economy and 70% of Austria's foreign trade is intraregional with other EU member states.

48. Mr. Kickert stressed that the private sector has a critical role to play in the implementation of the VPoA and the LLDCs should look at what is needed to attract increased and more diversified foreign direct investment. From his country's experience he pointed out that a stable, predictable and enabling investment environment is needed to fully leverage the impact of the private sector. To this end, the rule of law, good governance, the respect of human rights, gender equality, as well as accountable and transparent institutions are essential factors for success.

49. **H.E. Mr. Lang Yabou, the Permanent Representative of Gambia to the United Nations** highlighted the opportunity arising from the entry into force of the African Continental Free trade Area and the launch of the Single African Air Transport Market. He stressed the need for the international community to increase their ODA to landlocked developing countries. Mr. Yabou stated that greater regional cooperation, and other regional initiatives between LLDCs and transit countries can optimize the benefits of trade and commerce for all stakeholders. Citing the need for enhanced trade facilitation and investment in infrastructure between landlocked and transit countries, he shared that the Senegambia bridge has drastically reduced the transit time for people and goods between Senegal and Gambia. He also shared that Gambia is simplifying border crossings, improving port facilities and studying plans for dry ports to facilitate access for its neighbors.

50. Mr. Yabou underscored that climate change is one of the major challenges of LLDCs especially their limited resilience. He called for the international community to redouble its efforts in providing the necessary support to the LLDCs on resilience building and disaster risk reduction including preparedness, early warning and early action.

51. **H.E. Ms. Adela Raz, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations** highlighted that trade expansion, infrastructure development and increased economic growth are the foundations of economic growth and poverty reduction. She indicated that as a land-locked developing country that endures continued security concerns, Afghanistan is faced with a number of challenges to the priority areas identified in the VPoA. She pointed out that the unpredictable closure of trade routes, sole dependency on one country for the import and export of goods has weakened the ability to get Afghan goods into external markets. She also underscored that traders had to heavily depend on a very unpredictable political environment not knowing if their goods, which usually for Afghanistan as an agrarian economy are seasonal fruits and vegetables, could be exported at the right time. She highlighted that Afghanistan's recent economic development agenda was to diversify trade and connect the country to markets outside the region. She noted that her country had invested in various trade and transit routes to link not only Afghanistan to the markets beyond the region, but in fact build a transit between the South and Central Asian economies. For example, she noted that the Lapis Lazuli trade and transit agreement, signed between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia, helps connect the European market and the Chabahar port agreement between Afghanistan, India and Iran provides another trading and transit route.

52. The Ambassador noted that Afghanistan recently was able to open air corridors with India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Uzbekistan, Indonesia. This was an important step for increasing exports and balancing our trade deficit. She also noted that Afghanistan's unique geographical location can serve as the bridge between regional markets in particular for energy to their north is an energy rich market, while to our south, there is a great demand for energy. In this regard, the TAPI gas pipeline project is an important example which helps in the supply of the Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to markets in Pakistan and India. On regional integration, she noted that Afghanistan has worked with its neighbors to solidify Afghanistan as a regional hub for transit, trade and connectivity over the past three years, on the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). She underscored the need for heavy infrastructure projects that help transport linkages in the remaining years of the VPoA. Donors must fulfill their commitments to the land-locked developing countries, specially those in conflict and post-conflict situations. With this support, countries, like Afghanistan, will continue to work towards sustainable development and lasting peace.

53. **H.E. Mr. Brian Patrick Flynn, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations**, emphasized the need to tackle the challenge of structural economic transformation, to promote diversification, industrialization, sustained and inclusive economic growth and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for the LLDCs. He said that the benefits of globalization should not bypass the LLDCs. He stressed that addressing the challenges faced by LLDCs and transit countries requires action by all including the international community, together, in global partnership. He noted that Ireland recently updated international development policy in which it committed to strengthening, deepening and expanding Ireland's existing partnerships with LLDC and others. Development cooperation is only one thread in deepening our relations with our development partners. At the core of this partnership is a commitment to promote inclusive economic growth and trade and support initiatives that seek to foster trade and investment. He noted that LLDCs remain highly vulnerable to the adverse and often devastating impact of climate change and that regional integration is important for these countries. Concrete action for these challenges would be essential. He pointed out that with increasing desertification in the Sahel, receding glaciers and land degradation in Central Asia, to name but a few of the challenges, it is clear that LLDCs are among the frontline countries threatened by climate change.

54. Mr. Flynn noted that as part of Ireland's updated development policy, a new strategy for cooperation with African development partners - Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025 will see Ireland strengthen political partnerships with African countries and institutions and will put in place frameworks to boost trade and investment. He noted that half of Ireland's development partners in Africa are LLDCs and these will continue to be the focus of Ireland's assistance albeit with a renewed vigor and approach which focuses on trade and investment. He noted that regional integration has been central to the success of Ireland as a small, open, trading and competitive economy. He welcomed the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area and expressed hope that this free trade area can provide the same prosperity to Africa as European integration has brought to Europe.

55. **H.E. Mr. Mohamed Fathi Edrees, the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations** stressed that there is an urgent need to foster productive capacities and structural economic transformation by focusing on economic diversification, ICT, energy and human capital

development. He indicated that there is need to move away from project-based problem solving approach, towards programme-based interventions, strengthen cooperation beyond trade, including on development projects in infrastructure, transport, and industrial development, and intensify industrialization in LLDCs through linkages with regional value and global value chains, and enhance intra-regional trade, and special economic zones. He underscored that there is need to attract private investment, including foreign direct investment and encourage strengthening South-South cooperation with the involvement of donors, as well as cooperation among sub-regional and regional organizations. He noted that Official Development Assistance is key and indispensable for achieving sustainable development goals and should be aligned with national priorities and development strategies of the recipient countries. The entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade will create new opportunities for African countries with its focus on youth employment, developing regional value chains and supporting the creation of regional infrastructure.

56. Ambassador Edrees highlighted that in this spirit, Egypt organized the 4th edition of the "Investment for Africa Forum" in November 2019. The forum provided a unique pan African platform bringing together African heads of state and governments in inclusive interaction with prominent regional and international investors, as well as international financial institutions. 13 deals worth \$3 billion were signed at the conference and the forum made seven recommendations, including to call on international financial institutions and investment funds to finance infrastructure projects in Africa. He indicated that Egypt established as well the "Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development" as the first South-South Cooperation institution in Egypt aiming at putting the country's comparative advantages and technical expertise into play for the benefit of the South, and in particular of Africa. Meanwhile, several Egyptian companies took a leading role in directing investments to infrastructure sector, particularly telecommunications and construction in landlocked developing countries.

57. **H.E. Mr. Wu Haitao, the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations** stated that after five years of implementation, the Vienna Programme of Action has seen some achievements, but its progress is not balanced. He underscored that the international community should continue to promote the full implementation of the VPoA and support LLDCs in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. He urged that there is need to deepen international development cooperation to create a favorable development environment for LLDCs. In particular, there is a need to adhere to north-south cooperation as the main channel where developed countries should honor their ODA commitments actively, while developing countries in general should actively conduct south-south cooperation and triangular cooperation. He urged that the UN should continue to support LLDCs' efforts to realize sustainable development.

58. Mr. Wu Haitao noted that it is necessary to firmly defend multilateralism, oppose unilateralism and protectionism, maintain the multilateral trade system, implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement and help LLDCs better integrate into the world trade system. He stressed that more must be done to strengthen connectivity cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries, help LLDCs address their geographical constraints, and promote LLDCs' better integration into regional and global supply chains so as to facilitate their all-round economic and social advancement. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is actively cooperating with LLDCs

and will continue to support their efforts in infrastructure, trade, digital industry and energy and other areas and create space for cooperation that features openness, mutual benefit, win-win and equality to jointly realize sustainable development and build a community with a shared future for mankind.

59. **H.E. Ms. Maria Angela Zappia, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations**, shared that there is a need to increase efforts related to the main areas of the Vienna Programme of Action with priority given to four lines of action. From a strategic perspective, priority should be given to four lines of actions: First, advancing regional integration since neighboring transit countries are key to LLDCs exports and constitute potential end-markets for LLDCs' products. Regional integration processes may improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of transport infrastructures, trade facilities and market mechanisms, thus stimulating domestic investments in the LLDCs and attracting foreign direct investments.

60. Second, improving LLDCs' access to electricity and renewable energy sources. Access to energy is a prerequisite for any meaningful sustainable development strategy and renewable energy is increasingly indispensable. Italy has a consolidated experience in strengthening the capabilities of the LLDCs in the field of energy access from renewable sources, particularly in Africa, with an active involvement of the most relevant actors of the Italian private sector for example, the solar project carried out by Italy in Zambia, in the framework of the World Bank Group's "Scaling Solar" program and with the active engagement of the Italian company ENEL. Similar initiatives are in place in other African LLDCs, such as Ethiopia, in the framework of National programs aimed at energy diversification and solar plants construction.

61. Third, promoting a greater role of the private sector. The growth of a development-oriented domestic private sector and the attraction of international investors are largely dependent on the establishment in the LLDCs of a favorable normative framework. This includes protecting and reinforcing property rights, strengthening the rule of law and democratic multi-level participation, granting to all vulnerable categories, in particular women and youth, equitable access to economic opportunities. Landlocked developing States must be supported in managing complex investment-related negotiations, she said, recalling that Italy provides legal and professional assistance to these countries on such matters. Investing in education and training is also fundamental; it would facilitate the required increase in labor productivity and open new possibilities for landlocked developing States.

62. **H.E. Mr. Marc-Andre Blanchard, the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations**, stressed that Canada is committed to strengthening cooperation with LLDC partners to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the LLDC partners' national development strategies and priorities. He expressed that LLDCs face severe structural impediments to sustainable development and remoteness from world markets. He continued that the adverse effects of climate change, in particular, land degradation and drought add to these challenges. He stressed that at the same time, there are opportunities for LLDCs to harness new technologies and the digital economy in support of sustainable development. Mr. Blanchard noted that that Canada cooperates with Ethiopia to increase agricultural production and improve nutrition to promote employment and improve means of subsistence, especially for women. He indicated that in Afghanistan, development aid is focused on health, education, women's right and

improving women's economic opportunities. He highlighted that Canada supports the resilience of the population affected by crisis and noted that Canada supports policies and programmes in Mali to improve the condition of maternal and child reproductive health services.

63. Mr. Blanchard stressed that all sources of finance must be mobilized to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and that Canada's international aid promotes, peace, security and economic growth by supporting agricultural production and economic empowerment of women in rural areas. He noted that Canada is also working with partners to mobilize additional financing for sustainable development. He communicated that Canada is expanding its development finance toolkit, and establishing new innovative partnerships that catalyze private capital for the SDGs. He mentioned that September's High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development demonstrated that there is interest to increase the share of new forms of development finance available to LDCs and LLDCs.

64. Mr. Blanchard stressed that Canada recognizes the infrastructure needs of LLDCs to drive growth, and supports global efforts to increase private sector investments in infrastructure through the G7, G20, UN and multilateral development banks. He stressed Canada's support to the 'Closing the Investment Gap' initiative and the World Bank Global Infrastructure Hub helps develop critical infrastructure projects around the world, including in landlocked developing countries. He mentioned that LLDCs are important economic partners for Canada and Canada recognizes that greater integration of LLDCs into world trade and global value chains is vital for increasing their competitiveness and ensuring their economic development. He applauded the efforts made by LLDCs to implement the Agreement on Trade Facilitation and adopt measures to simplify trade regulations, documents and procedures, with support from their development partners and transit countries. He communicated that promoting economic security is one of Canada's five priorities for the Security Council. He emphasized that if elected for the 2021- 22 term, Canada will continue to work to align public and private capital with the SDGs and to develop new and innovative ways to increase investment into developing countries, including LLDCs.

65. **H.E. Mr. Mutotwe L. Kafwaya, Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Zambia**, highlighted that Zambia launched a new Transport Policy with the aim of transforming the country into a regional transport and logistics hub. This is to be achieved through the development of the transport corridors in the sub-region for Southern Africa. He stressed that Zambia has been working with its neighboring countries and other stakeholders on the domestication of agreed legal frameworks, transit rules and policies. Also, that Zambia has significantly invested in both development and rehabilitation of infrastructure in renewable energy, water and sanitation systems, ICTs and transport to facilitate meaningful development. Furthermore, Minister Kafwaya indicated that the Government has planned to diversify its economy from mining to agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing and towards value addition in mining and processing of precious and semi-precious stones. He continued that Zambia has developed the first ever Industrial Policy which aims to improve the country's productive capacity and promote the production and consumption of local content.

66. **H.E. Mr. Mohammad Aamir Khan, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations** explained that LLDCs suffer challenges from inadequate infrastructure, connectivity and corridor facilities to overcome structural deficiencies and limited capacities to

undergo world trade. In fact, one third of the LLDCs' population continues to live in poverty and LLDCs still account for less than one percent of the global merchandise trade. As a transit country, Pakistan has made significant steps and efforts to help landlocked developing countries. He communicated that as a transit country, Pakistan has made significant steps and concerted efforts to provide assistance to the LLDCs. He continued that Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement was signed in 2010 with an aim to provide necessary development means to the landlocked Afghanistan. He noted that the volume of trade from this corridor only in 2018-19 has been US\$ 5,516 million. Opening of Torkham crossing for commercial traffic on a 24/7 basis have added another tangible dimension to the close cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He highlighted that the reason of joining the China's Belt and Road Initiative is to fully complement and contribute to the goals and objectives set in the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda. He stressed that the scale and scope of the initiative is enormous and it stands out as the most significant initiative for promoting transnational connectivity, enhancing trade and investment and facilitating cooperation to fully utilize the economic potential of the participating countries.

67. Mr. Mohammad Aamir Khan communicated that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a central part of the BRI network and is an all-inclusive economic corridor for the region. He continued that it is the fastest and most effective among all projects in the BRI. He emphasized that CPEC is expected to bring huge economic and development benefits to both countries and the region. He stressed that by promoting regional connectivity, enhancing trade and investment and stimulating regional growth, CPEC is expected to help improve the lives of an estimated 3 billion people in China, South Asia, Central Asia and beyond. He noted that Pakistan's energy connectivity project CASA-1000 will further Pakistan's efforts of connectivity with the landlocked countries in Central Asia. He continued that Pakistan's participation in the SAFTA, the SCO, and the ECO is proof of Pakistan's commitment to the development of landlocked countries of Pakistan's region in line with VPoA. He concluded by promising Pakistan's support for LLDCs.

68. **H.E. Mr. Mohammad Kurniadi Koba, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations** noted that the world today is characterized with increasing interdependent nature of trade, finance and technology as well as increasingly uneven distribution of wealth and knowledge, within and among countries. He continued that while a number of progress has been achieved by the LLDCs to advance their economy and development, this group of countries continue to face specific constraints and challenges, including poverty; low productivity; limited economic resources; deficiencies in physical infrastructures; and inadequate market access. He welcomed development in areas such as the deepening of regional integration and cooperation; high rate of acceptance of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation; and improvement of quality of infrastructure and of access to energy and ICT. He continued that LLDCs share in global merchandise trade remains very low, and in fact decreasing to only 0.98% in 2018. He communicated that it is imperative to strengthen partnerships and collaboration to muster support and assistance to transform LLDCs to become a "land-linked" country. He stressed that Indonesia stands ready to work with the UN and international community to achieve this objective, among others through bridging financing gap for transportation and infrastructure as well as enhancing capacity to participate in the global supply chain.

69. Mr. Koba communicated that it is important to address means of implementation regarding the needs of the LLDCs. He stressed that although significant efforts in domestic resources mobilization have been made, enormous financing gaps still persist. He continued that international community must provide enhanced resources to the LLDCs, such as in the form of Official Development Assistance, Foreign Direct Investment, and South-South and triangular cooperation. He expressed that they should also continue to provide technical assistance and capacity development support, based on the needs and priorities of the respective LLDCs. He continued that such support can include in the areas of economic diversification; promotion of innovation and technology; and strengthening of resource mobilization, including to obtain access to available financing. He concluded by reiterating that the VPoA is the global commitment that all member states are dedicated to and that all member states should continue their support for LLDCs in accelerating its implementation.

70. **H.E. Ms. Ana Silvia Rodriguez Abascal, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations** called stressed that timely and effective implementation of VPoA is critical for 2030 agenda and both should be promoted in unison. She noted that failure to meet the target will have impact on the member states' aspirations for sustainability and resilience. She welcomed the progress made and implementation of the VPoA. She noted that it is regrettable that there are still areas that need improvement to bring about sustainable development of the LLDCs. She expressed that she recognizes the needs and particular challenges facing the LLDCs due to geographical conditions and limitations that impact their sustainable development. She called upon the international community and the UN development system to pay special attention to the six priority areas of the VPoA. She expressed that the member states should work to strengthen means of implementation of VPoA, in particular, funding, technology transfer, strengthening of capacity and promotion of alliances. She expressed that developed countries should honor their historic responsibilities and international commitment including with regard to official development assistance and climate change mitigation. She communicated that Cuba defends unique right to mutual respect and recognizes common but differentiated responsibilities. She concluded by noting that South-South cooperation can complement implementation of the VPoA.

71. **H.E. Mr. Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations**, noted that the implementation of the VPoA should be seen in the larger context of the realization of the 2030 Agenda as well as its interlinkage with other strategic framework documents, such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. He noted that addressing the specific challenges faced by LLDCs is essential for achieving the SDGs. He indicated that Armenia strongly advocates for regional and sub-regional cooperation and connectivity through trade and transport. He communicated that in development of regional connectivity Armenia is guided by the principles of inclusivity, transparency, equal and non-discriminatory partnership. He stressed that connectivity plays a crucial role for promoting cross-border cooperation and bringing closer the people divided by conflicts and crises, thus promoting confidence and trust. He noted that despite the volatile situation in Armenia, the country continues to develop its transit potential as a corridor between Europe and Asia. He explained that the project of North-South highway, which is currently underway, will connect the Persian Gulf with the ports of the Black sea. He communicated that the Government of Armenia prioritizes development of Information and Communication Technologies as an important tool to lower costs, facilitate access to foreign

markets, thus contributing to increase of foreign trade. He continued that with very high rate of internet penetration and rapidly growing IT industry, Armenia has ensured open and affordable Internet access throughout the country.

72. Mr. Margaryan stressed that unilateral coercive measures are detrimental to the sustainable development of LLDCs and their effective integration to the global markets. He explained that the continuing land blockade of Armenia's borders by its neighbours from West and East, multiplies the challenges arising from landlockedness. He continued that the attempts to isolate Armenia from regional economic cooperation and transport corridors, violate the principles of international law and are contrary to the aims of the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as the norms of the multilateral trading system. He highlighted that the closed borders, which hamper Armenia's access to the sea, significantly increase the costs of imports and exports, the transit communication routes. He explained that the land blockade directly contradicts the letter and spirit of the Agenda 2030, impeding realization of economic and social rights and economic participation, thus negatively affecting the implementation of the SDGs. He concluded by expressing that Armenia attaches special importance to inclusive regional cooperation between landlocked and transit countries as an essential prerequisite to remove political barriers for free movement of people, goods and services and realization of economic and social rights and right to development.

73. **H.E. Mr. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations**, indicated that GDP of LLDC countries reached 4.5% in 2017 and according to forecasts this number will be maintained in 2020, however, there is concern in the difference in growth of GDP between these countries. He also stressed the importance of the infrastructure and mentioned building of disaster resistant infrastructure and initiatives to bridge digital divide and bring access to financial resources. He noted that he shares the need to end poverty and hunger and to fight for peace, just and inclusive society. He stressed the importance to strive for three pillars for development in the areas of economic, social and environmental development. He noted that Paraguay and Bolivia have made efforts to improve the transport infrastructure and connectivity. There have also been initiatives in the Latin American region to bridge the digital divide and improve access to financing. He reiterated his Government's commitment to international law, good governance, and the rule of law.

74. **Ms. Ontlametse B. Ward, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Botswana**, shared Botswana's national efforts aimed at improving interconnectivity and competitiveness by explaining that Botswana's national development priorities are growth and economic resilience; economic diversification; employment creation; and poverty alleviation. She continued that Botswana has put in place policies and programmes to achieve these objectives including among others National Development Plan 11, Vision 2036, National Trade Policy, Economic Diversification Drive Strategy, and Industrial Development Policy. She continued that infrastructure development, including ICT, transport, and energy infrastructure have been afforded more prominence in the development of National Development Plan 11. She explained that Botswana Government is actively pursuing strategies for regional cooperation on infrastructure development and integration as a means of creating more active trade routes and expanding market access. She continued that Botswana together with Namibia and South Africa have developed a Trans Kalahari Corridor, which is a highway aimed at facilitating faster and cheaper movement of goods between the three

countries. She indicated that Botswana has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the North-South corridor, which will further link Botswana to other trading partners in the north and south.

75. Ms. Ontlametse B. Ward shared that Botswana and Zambia are in the process of constructing the Kazungula Bridge which is a joint project between the two countries aimed to further facilitate movements of goods and persons along the north-south corridor as well as to facilitate trade. She explained that Botswana further envisages the development of the Trans Kalahari Rail line to Namibia. She indicated that the Raii line will also link to Zambia via the Kazungula road and Rail Bridge. She communicated that these projects are expected to reduce transport costs and link Botswana to regional and global markets. She indicated that Botswana attaches great importance to the implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement as attested by the fact that the country was one of the first to ratify the Agreement and to notify all categories of the Agreement. She emphasized that Botswana is grateful for the assistance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which has enabled Botswana to develop the National Trade Facilitation roadmap as well as training for the National Trade Facilitation Committee members. She shared that Botswana with assistance from UNCTAD and Commonwealth Secretariat has completed the review of the National Trade Policy and National Export Strategy which are intended amongst others, to contribute to economic and export diversification; improved global competitiveness; private sector development; citizen economic empowerment and poverty eradication.

76. **H.E. Ms. Isbeth Lisbeth Quiel Murcia, Deputy Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations**, expressed that it has been five years since the adoption of the VPoA and progress has been made but some areas such as eradication of poverty and risk related to climate change continue to be the priorities. She stressed that efforts must include financial resource mobilization, generating reliable data to inform new policies and technical assistance for capacity-building. She communicated that she concurs with the reference the Secretary-General made about importance of the international community increasing support in form of ODA, South-South and triangular cooperation and FDA. She communicated that Panama is a developing country and quality infrastructure and connectivity play a key role in achieving development. She noted that establishing strategic alliances to increase public and private investment and infrastructure are crucial for closing gap within and between countries. She concluded by expressing her commitment for joint collaboration and promised that she stands in solidarity for effective implementation of the VPoA.

77. **H.E. Mr. Nagaraj Naidu Kakanur, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations**, indicated that the VPoA is integral for 2030 agenda and explained that India as a transit and developing country will give support and experience. He shared that India established Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal initiative (BBIN) to strengthen economic cooperation and trade connectivity and give these countries greater access to global supply chain. He noted that the trade and air-services agreements between India-Nepal and India-Bhutan confer transit rights for the exports and imports without customs duties or trade restrictions and efficient tourist connectivity. He informed that the BBIN is also discussing areas of power, water resources, management of inland waterways connectivity and rail connectivity.

78. Furthermore, he shared that India is also cooperating with Afghanistan and Iran for development of the Chahbahar Port and working on the International North-South Transport Corridor. India has also joined the Ashgabat Agreement which envisages facilitation of transit and transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. In 2017, India-Afghanistan direct air freight corridor was established and it gives quick access to Indian market for health and education services. He continued that India is cooperating with countries such as Afghanistan and Iran for additional projects. He highlighted that India is also involved in International Solar Alliances and efforts to build disaster resilient infrastructure. He explained that the aim is to give access to LLDCs and developing countries affordable solar energy. He stressed that these actions help 2030 agenda and Paris agreement. He continued that in the spirit of South-South cooperation, India launched the \$150 million India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, which aims to drive transformational projects and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals in least developed and landlocked developing countries. In just about two years, the Fund has been able to develop 38 projects in 36 partnering countries. He concluded by promising full commitment and experience.

79. **H.E. Mr. Dmitry S. Chumakov, the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations** stated that Russia, as a major transit country, actively contributes to the attainment of the objectives of the VPoA, namely by promoting various measures to develop transportation in Eurasia. He highlighted joint projects in this area, including the North-South Trade Route, the Europe-Western China Route and the Arctic-Siberia-Asia Corridor, which link ports from the Northern Sea Route to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. He added that Russia attaches particular importance to further modernizing the Trans-Siberian Railroad and increasing the carrying capacity of the network to 100 million tonnes by 2024. He indicated that Russia is actively pursuing intergovernmental agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railways, as well as the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports. The Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport between Russia, China and Mongolia, which entered into force in September 2018, created a new economic corridor between these three countries. He underlined that Russia's unique geographical location allows it to act as a bridge in Eurasian transportation infrastructure and participate in the establishment of global transit transport systems meeting LLDCs and others' needs. He noted that China's Belt and Road initiative echoes Russia's idea of closely linking various integration projects in Eurasia. He concluded by noting the expertise and potential of UN Regional Economic Commissions and specialized regional organizations such as Eurasian Economic Union the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Black Sea Economic Council in strengthening global transport connectivity.

80. **Ms. Limpho Masilo-Motsmai, Director Economic International Organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lesotho**, communicated that during the period in review, Lesotho was implementing the National Strategic Development Plan I, a five-year medium-term plan. She explained that based on lessons learned, Lesotho has developed the NSDP II to cover the period, 2018/19 - 2022/23. She continued that the plan is intended to achieve long term national, regional and international development frameworks. She explained that likewise, the priorities of the VPoA are mainstreamed in the NSDP II to enhance economic competitiveness and improve trade facilitation for employment creation. She explained that on trade matters, Lesotho's export partners have not changed much over the years and the export products are mainly diamonds, textiles, wool and mohair. She stressed that Lesotho has also established the Lesotho Standard Institution in 2018, and recently finalized the Trade Policy Framework with support from the European Union SADC

Trade Related Facility and working on the Development of an Export Strategy to identify sectors for growth to integrate domestic firms into regional and global value chains.

81. Ms. Masilo-Motsmai noted that Lesotho has ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, notified categories A, B and C and established the National Trade Facilitation Committee that is currently capacitated through the UNCTAD Empowerment Programme. She continued that the government has also taken advantage of regional integration to lower bandwidth prices for Lesotho and has introduced a government project to increase government efficiency and public service delivery.

82. **H.E. Ms. Sophia Tesfamariam, Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations**, noted that Eritrea is a transit country and recognizes that there is crucial work ahead of all member states to implement the VPoA with common understanding of the need for an inventive, universal, result oriented programme of action. She asked the question of how much the promise can be kept in five years. She indicated that out of 32 LLDCs, 17 are least developed and some have large population. She stressed that LLDCs' physical, economic, infrastructure challenges are compounded by transit neighbors who are also least developed countries also facing infrastructure and technical challenges. She stressed that the region is determined and committed to working together to transform itself into the new frontier of the global economy. She shared the difficulties Eritrea faced with war and imposition of UN sanctions and indicated that Eritrea included infrastructure development as the priority to overcome the challenges. She continued that Eritrea strives to mobilize internal resources to connect every village in town with roads and to increase education, healthcare and transportation in remote regions. She also noted that Eritrea is refurbishing and rehabilitating roads in neighboring states and constructing new roads to connect with Sudan and Ethiopia. She highlighted that Eritrea rehabilitated strategic ports from which African can benefit. She continued that there are roads in Eritrea's three key economic regions and Eritrea also established foreign trade links. She concluded by stressing that LLDC and transit countries can reach their goals together.

83. **Ms. Kumbirayi Taremba, Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations** noted that some of the progress made in her country include the harmonization of transport and transit policies and procedures with transit countries, the development of transport infrastructure and the expansion of trade. She continued that there has also been increased bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation, especially with regard to trade-facilitating infrastructure. She explained that regrettably the global economic scenario continues to be extremely challenging especially for LLDCs and prospects for global recovery are not encouraging, particularly with weak recovery in the developed world and growing turbulence in emerging economies. She stressed that it is important to address the means of implementation regarding the needs of the LLDCs as they require sustained and unwavering cooperation in terms of financial and technical support. She reiterated that the international community needs to pay greater attention to addressing the needs of countries facing unique development challenges in order to ensure that the VPoA produces tangible benefits and improved livelihoods for all. She explained that the Government of Zimbabwe in October 2018, launched its development plan, the Transitional Stabilization Programme 2018-2020, which outlines socio economic, corporate and governance reforms, key in facilitating the realization of the country's vision, that of transforming Zimbabwe into an upper middle-income economy by 2030.

84. Ms. Taremba explained that Zimbabwe is committed to VPoA as exemplified by Zimbabwe's mantra "Zimbabwe is open for Business", Zimbabwe has shifted attention to focus on policies aimed at aiding the country's economic growth and recovery through carving a new course which creates a conducive investment environment. She explained that Zimbabwe's experience has shown that bilateral and regional cooperation play a crucial role in addressing the impact of landlockedness. She stressed the importance of connectivity with the subregion and the African region and in this context, Zimbabwe is implementing a national policy on transforming itself from being land-locked into a land-linked country. She noted that Zimbabwe has identified transport and connectivity network, as key elements of its national development plans in order to develop linkages between national roads and enhance connectivity with the neighboring countries. She highlighted that being at the very heart of the North-South transport corridor in the Southern Africa sub-region, Zimbabwe has a natural geographical advantage by virtue of being centrally situated. She explained that this fact makes Zimbabwe the gateway to and from the north and Zimbabwe borders three countries with coastlines, namely Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. She noted that Zimbabwe is actively engaged in the relevant multilateral processes aimed at further developing transit Corridors Discussions are on-going with South Africa and Mozambique to map out plans for a Southern Corridor. She also stressed that at a broader regional level, Zimbabwe has played an active part in the process of ensuring long term sustainability and growth beyond reliance on export of primary commodities. She explained that as Chair of SADC in 2015, Zimbabwe spearheaded the adoption of the SADC Industrialization Strategy, which seeks to engender major economic and technological transformation at national and regional levels; accelerate the growth momentum and enhance the comparative and competitive advantages of the economies of the SADC region.

85. **H.E. Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov, the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations** shared that countries in Central Asia had made advances in regional cooperation which is conducive to achieving not only targets identified in the Vienna Program of Action but overall in the Sustainable Development Goals. Due to joint efforts, the Central Asian countries within a short period of time have been able to create a fundamentally new political environment, raise the level of political trust, strengthen traditionally friendly and good neighborly relations among themselves. In particular, the agreements with neighboring countries allowed Uzbekistan to open dozens of checkpoints on the borders, liberalize the visa regime and streamline the transit procedures. Uzbekistan's trade turnover with other states of Central Asia for the past few years has increased two folds and number of joint ventures - by 4 times. At the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Consultative meetings of the Heads of State of the Central Asian countries started to be convened. The first meeting in such a format took place in March of 2018 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, and the second one was held in Tashkent in November 2019.

86. Mr. Ibragimov indicated that the President of Uzbekistan identified a number of perspective areas for deepening regional cooperation which are fully aligned with the VPoA. (i) Expanding cooperation in trade-economic, investment, transport communication and energy areas. In particular, Uzbekistan proposed to convene a Central Asian investment forum and a first meeting of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the five countries as well as to create a regional council on transport communications. (ii) Holding regular meetings on various levels to discuss issues

pertaining to advancing regional collaboration. (iii) Jointly addressing ecological and water issues in Central Asia. In order to attract innovative technologies, introduce principles of "green economy" and prevent desertification, Uzbekistan proposed to efficiently use opportunities existing within the United Nations Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region which was created last year. From Uzbekistan's perspective bringing these initiatives to fruition would have positive impact on the implementation of the VPoA. He noted that Uzbekistan is providing comprehensive assistance to the economic recovery of Afghanistan and its involvement in regional projects. He indicated Uzbekistan's support to such projects as TAPI, CASA-1000, construction of the railroad corridor «Mazari-Sharif- Herat» and a highway from Mazari-Sharif through Kabul to Peshawar as well as the practical implementation of various initiatives vital for Afghanistan in the areas of transport, energy, trade and education. One of the important areas is to facilitate trade relations. In this regard, Uzbekistan has established an international logistical center «Termez-Cargo Center» at the border with Afghanistan which is set to assist increasing export import and transit cargo flow.

87. **H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, the Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations** recalled the establishment of the first ever International Think Tank dedicated to landlocked developing countries and will assist in conducting in-depth analyses to find out constraints and challenges faced and identify concrete actions to overcome them. He shared that Mongolia established the National Working Group with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, to review and coordinate the national implementation of the VPoA. He indicated that in the past few years, Mongolia had developed its domestic soft and hard infrastructures. The country successfully connected all 2 provinces of the country through energy transmission lines, internet communication networks, and around 6,000 kilometers of paved roads. He noted that the President of Mongolia has called upon the establishment of Multilateral Institution for Electricity Grid Interconnections in North East Asia which will provide a number of economic, social and environmental benefits to this sub-region.

88. Mr. Sukhee pointed out that Mongolia had concluded several agreements with neighboring countries including "The Agreement on access to and from the sea and transit transport through China's territory by Mongolia", the Intergovernmental agreement between Governments of Mongolia and the Russian Federation on the Terms for the Rail Freight Transit Transportation and the Intergovernmental agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network between Mongolia, the Russian Federation and China. He highlighted that Mongolia is implementing the Mongolia-Russia-China Economic Corridor Program that aligns our own "Development Road" program to the "Belt and Road" initiative. In this framework, the country plans to implement 32 major projects towards increasing trade turnover, developing infrastructure, ensuring competitiveness in goods supply and facilitating cross-border transportation and had introduced several initiatives including Travel Facilitation Initiative for BRI countries. He underscored that it is of vital importance to promote cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries as well as among LLDCs. He indicated that it is necessary to establish an informal group of landlocked developing countries with further aim to establish a formal group of landlocked countries in the World Trade Organization to promote active collaboration among LLDCs, to identify common challenges facing by them in implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement which is an important milestone for the multilateral trading system.

89. **H.E. Mr. Milenko Esteban Skoknic Tapia, the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations** said his country grants broad and free rights for trade transit across its territory to its closest landlocked neighbor, Bolivia. In this context, Chile provides free warehousing in its ports, preferential tariffs, tax exemptions and an oil pipeline, also focusing on road, port and border infrastructure. Rights granted by this free transit regime must be exercised in accordance with the domestic legal system of the transit country. In order to meet objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action, Chile has free warehousing available for Paraguay and has expressed interest in a bio-oceanic corridor from Brazil crossing Paraguay and Argentina. He emphasized that Chile is a party to WTO trade facilitation agreement since October 2017 and notifies WTO the country's compliance with the obligations with the agreement. He continued that Chile established national committee for trade facilitation to recommend policies and projects. He indicated that Chile's efforts are reflected in constant participation in meetings and expressed the country's commitment to bridge the gap and to strive for sustainable development goals.

90. **H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations** noted that this midterm review provides an opportunity to remind the international community of the need and urgency for a strong commitment and support to LLDCs. He reported that Morocco is strengthening relationship and partnership with countries in special situation like LLDCs especially in the African region, which is at the heart of foreign policy. Morocco has fully engaged in strengthening cooperation with these countries through South-South cooperation. He called on the international community to use the tools offered by North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation to implement the VPoA and achieve sustainable development in the LLDCs. He expressed hope that the Political Declaration adopted earlier leads to concrete actions and partnerships. He noted the important role of resident coordinators in LLDCs for accelerating implementation of the VPoA. He concluded by stressing that LLDCs require assistance to realize the VPoA and 2030 Agenda, reaffirming Morocco's commitment to support LLDCs in the implementation of the VPoA.

91. **Mr. Fernando De La Mora Salcedo, Second Secretary of Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations**, said that landlocked developing country warrant special attention. He stressed that not having a direct access to sea should not be an obstacle for sustainable development. He noted that although Mexico is not one of these countries, Mexico has a first-hand experience in the enormous cost of customs delay. He continued that improving connectivity and border infrastructure can lead to job creation and decrease in inequality. He expressed that he concurs with the Secretary-General's report that harnessing digital technology can speed up inclusive growth. He noted that digital divide is pronounced in urban and rural areas of LLDCs. He called for Official Development Assistance and private investment to harness the opportunity of technology. Mr. Salcedo underscored the need to support landlocked developing countries with Triangular and South-South cooperation. He highlighted that remittances are greatest source of international income for LLDCs and technology can lower the cost of remittances by streamlining the transfer.

92. Mr. Salcedo noted that headway has been made in gender equality, reduction in child mortality, increase in access to water and sanitation and connectivity. He stressed that the countries are moving in the right direction and the roadmap reflected in the VPoA is seeing positive results. He shared that Mexico is establishing African Continental Free Trade Area and is building stronger

trade ties with this great continent. He concluded by reiterating Mexico's support for the implementation of the VPoA.

93. **Ms. Rebecca Wallace, Senior Economic Advisor, U.S. Mission to the United Nations** indicated that the United States understands the challenges that face the LLDCs, such as transit-policy issues, international trade, and regional integration. She said that despite challenges such as transit - policy issues, international trade and regional integration, there has been substantial progress in many landlocked developing States. Sweeping reforms like the African Continental Free Trade Area promise to open markets, lower trade and investment barriers lay the groundwork for greater competitiveness and economic growth for the 16 LLDCs on the continent. She stressed that the United States understands that aid alone cannot resolve the challenges that face the LLDCs, that is why agreements like AfCFTA are key. At the same time, development assistance is no substitute for economic growth led by private enterprise, and sustainable development requires both public and private sectors to work together to identify and address challenges. While lending and private investment are becoming increasingly accessible to developing countries, these inflows can come with risks, such as a lack of transparency and unsustainable borrowing. Countries with weak institutions, high levels of corruption, and macroeconomic challenges are particularly vulnerable. Under this situation, as she remarked, increased debt transparency and fiscal discipline, along with strong governance, are essential for landlocked developing countries. She highlighted points of clarification on some of the language contained in the political declaration.

94. **H.E. Mr. Martín García Moritán, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations**, expressed his gratitude for the high-level meeting and indicated that Argentina is a transit country to Bolivia and Paraguay. He expressed that historically, Argentina has always been collaborative and supportive to LLDC countries. He shared that there is an important project Argentina is working on with Bolivia and Paraguay, namely Paraguay Parana Waterway Project to advance physical regional integration. Argentina has jurisdiction over 1,240 km of the waterway and has signed a series of agreements establishing a normative system regulating transport through protocols and regulations, holding a bilateral round table with Paraguay and planning for a similar mechanism with Bolivia. He stressed that Argentina gave Bolivia and Paraguay access to overseas markets in a competitive condition by expanding exemption for vessels more than 50 meters in length and by reducing fees charged to ships that carry cargo and travel 300 km. He communicated that within the context of MERCOSUR, several measures have been implemented to facilitate trade such as the expansion of a Technical Committee's powers in 2018, enabling it to design an intra-Mercosur agreement, to streamline and simplify procedures related to imports, exports and the transit of goods. He concluded by reiterating Argentina's support for development of LLDCs and implementation of the VPoA.

95. **H.E. Mr. Taye Atskeselassie Made, the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations**, highlighted that since the adoption of the Vienna Program of Action, Ethiopia has integrated and continued its implementation in line with the country's national development plan and priorities. He stressed that Ethiopia has been taking policy measures to improve the country's manufacturing base and enhance its connectedness as well as competitiveness. He noted that achieving inclusive and sustainable industrialization and building resilient infrastructure are among the priorities of the Ethiopian government. He further reported that Ethiopia has given special attention to labor-intensive and light manufacturing sectors, established industrial parks

that simplify access to land, eliminate challenges related to trade logistics and custom service. He noted that the Ethiopian government has been making massive public investment in building infrastructure, with the objective of enhancing Ethiopia's productive capacity and to promote regional integration. He stressed that encouraging progress has been registered in expanding road, railway and air transport services and Ethiopia has also been working with neighboring transit countries to establish and maintain effective transit systems on the basis of common interest. He continued that recently Ethiopia has taken bold and historical decision that would among others, diversify Ethiopia's sea outlets and further promote regional integration, in addition to the decision to join the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA), as well as the preparations made to join the WTO in the near future.

96. Ambassador Amde shared that in order to maintain Ethiopia's achievements, the government is formulating a ten-year perspective plan that lasts to 2030 focusing on structural economic transformation and ensuring inclusive and sustainable development, in addition to boosting export growth. He stressed that the SDGs and other global programs such as the VPoA will be fully and effectively mainstreamed in the plan. He continued that the government is also taking bold measures to improve the "Doing Business Rank" of the country. He explained that a high-level team, chaired by the Prime Minister, is working on the issue, while a new logistics strategy, which is part of the government's effort to promote the external trade sector and reduce transaction costs by engaging the private sector, has already been issued. He reiterated Ethiopia's call for the international community to strengthen forging durable, transparent, accountable and effective partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries and development partners to support LLDCs in their development endeavors and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

97. **H.E. Mrs. Mirgul Moldoisaeva, the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations** shared that regional cooperation in Central Asia has reached a new level, with countries working together to overcome border issues, liberalize trade rules, harmonize national legal systems, promote security, coordinate energy sector development and enhance highway and railway connections. Citing other efforts, she said transregional energy trade is being promoted, with a major project to facilitate energy export from Central Asia to Southern Asia. In addition, Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) in 2015, representing a prime example of successful cooperation as it has gained duty-free access to European Union countries on over 6,000 types of goods. Having joined the multilateral agreement of International Think Tank for LLDCs in 2017, Kyrgyzstan shared its goal and contributed to it. In order to overcome challenges of sustainable development and improve wealth of landlocked developing countries, Kyrgyzstan initiated the establishment of the Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries to address development challenges. For future progress, Mrs. Moldoisaeva stressed that procedures for trade, transit and movement of commodities and services must be simplified and called for the full implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and additional initiatives to ensure adequate support for landlocked countries.

98. **H.E. Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, the Permanent Representative of Republic of Rwanda to the United Nations** emphasized that the first point she wants to make is that being landlocked does not equate to perpetual poverty. She highlighted that in the words of her President Paul Kagame, 'geography should not be seen as an excuse for underdevelopment. She explained that Rwanda chose to invest in existing opportunities rather than blame the country's geographical

disposition and the results have been encouraging. She indicated that in terms of social and economic development, Rwanda has tripled the country's GDP between 2000-2018. She emphasized that in doing so, Rwanda achieved all but one Millennium Development Goals, registering historic achievements in reducing maternal and child mortality, and reducing inequality levels. She explained that all this was enabled by visionary political leadership and innovative policies. She stressed that there is no substitute for responsible political leadership.

99. Ambassador Rugwabiza emphasized that her second point is the importance of regional integration and infrastructure connectivity for LLDCs. She shared that regional integration has been identified as one of the core measures in relation to unlocking Africa's potential towards economic growth and development. She explained that for the EAC region, spatial distribution and diverse endowments in the region, has made it prudent to develop multi-country infrastructure to facilitate cross border movement of people, goods and services which is championed at the highest political level by the EAC Heads of State. She indicated that the East African Road Network Project, comprises of a pool of multinational road projects at least a stretch in every Partner State, to link land locked Partner States to the sea. She continued that the operationalization of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) is also yielding good results. She indicated that 4 days ago, the Rwanda-DR Congo OSBP border of La Corniche started operating. She explained that these play a vital role in enhancing cross border trade and movement of persons within the EAC region but more so for land locked members. She noted that a number of joint Railway Projects are currently underway in the EAC region; these include the \$5 Billion Dar es Salaam-Isaka-Kigali SGR between Rwanda and Tanzania along the Central Corridor whose studies are all completed, now in Financing/Resource mobilization phase.

100. Ambassador Rugwabiza continued to discuss the progress that has been made. She explained that the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) is being advanced through finalizing regional regulations to ensure the liberalization of air transport services. She also indicated that the EAC continues to implement a number of regional energy projects for oil pipelines, power generation and interconnection projects. She continued that these include, the Rusumo 81MW Hydro power project between Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, The Kagitumba/Mirama Shango and Birembo hydro, among many others. She explained that these help in industrializing our region, domestic purposes and also for socio-economic transformation. She emphasized that the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action will require the member states to tackle persisted challenges including financial constraints in implementing the required large infrastructure projects which are capital intensive. She also stressed that it is required to address geopolitical uncertainties that threaten to stall progress on regional initiatives. She lastly emphasized to tackle coordination and prioritization of regional projects in a manner that satisfies member states interests in an acceptable manner. She concluded by stressing that the role of the United Nations will be vital to ensuring the Vienna Programme of Action is successfully achieved and reiterated that in supporting Member States, bodies such as UNCTAD play an important role in capacity building, technical support, and financing for key projects in LLDCs.

101. **H.E. Mr. Lazarus Ombai Amayo, the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations** noted that LLDCs continue to face numerous barriers to trade, which erodes their competitiveness and affects their economic growth and sustainable development. He emphasized that some of the key areas where LLDCs and transit countries can enhance their cooperation

include: infrastructure development and maintenance, particularly, in transport, energy, and ICT; implementation of the legal framework that make clearance of goods faster; improvement and harmonization of customs procedures and standards; harmonization of policies between the LLDCs and transit countries. He noted the need for strengthened cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries, for innovative solutions to reduce high transport and trade transaction costs.

102. Ambassador Amayo stressed that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) will ease the free movement of people, goods and services across the continent, hence transforming the 1.2 billion African population into a seamless investment and growth platform. He then noted the importance of aligning the AfCTA with the VPoA to ensure that specific needs of LLDCs are addressed. He further noted the importance of sustainable financing and capacity building and technical assistance, from Member States, international organizations and the private sector alike, to support LLDCs' efforts in the implementation of the VPoA. He concluded by restating Kenya's commitment to poverty eradication, noting synergies between the VPoA and 2030 Agenda.

103. **H.E. Mr. Amrit Bahadur Rai, the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations** indicated that although efforts have been made and despite some progress, they fall short of LLDCs' commitments. He continued that the average economic growth is not encouraging for many LLDCs and the infrastructure gap is huge. He also emphasized that the commodity dependence has rendered LLDCs exposed to the erratic fluctuations in international markets. Most of the LLDCs incur large trade deficits and that the share of LLDCs on global trade remains insignificant. He shared that in terms of the growth of the export volume, LLDCs have performed lower than the LDCs average since 2014. He continued that the opportunities brought by the technological revolution have not been materialized for the LLDCs. He explained that due to their remoteness from intercontinental cables and lack of ICT infrastructures, there has not been enough progress on e-commerce. He also indicated that LLDCs further grapple with the adverse impacts of climate change and disasters. He communicated that geographical constraints hinder the effective response in the situation of disaster and the reconstruction in the aftermath.

104. Ambassador Rai underscored the full, timely and effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA). He indicated that for this, the national efforts need to be complemented by adequate international support measures in all pillars including ODA, investments, trade and technology transfer. He explained that LLDCs require an enhanced level of foreign direct investment for infrastructure development. He indicated that cooperation from transit countries, support of development partners and partnership of proactive private sector can critically enhance the productive capacity of LLDCs. He indicated that while all the six priority areas of VPoA are crucial for Nepal, Nepal's focus is on bridging the huge infrastructure gap that further augments the cost of geographical remoteness. He highlighted that Nepal also realizes the need for structural transformation, and therefore the country has adopted development plans with medium term as well as long-term transformative vision. He explained that the Government of Nepal has put all its efforts towards accelerated economic development guided by the overarching national aspiration of 'Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali'. He emphasized that since resources are limited, enhanced level of external support is important. He indicated that international resources both public and private must be utilized in productive sectors.

105. Ambassador Rai indicated that Nepal has signed important agreements with its neighbors on multimodal connectivity. He continued that important projects are underway on railways, roads, highway tunnels, international airports and inland waterways. He explained that Nepal also considers the regional organizations such as SAARC and BIMSTEC as important platforms for multidimensional regional connectivity and increase intraregional trade. He continued that through these steps, Nepal is aiming for meaningful participation in global and regional value chains, and to fully transform itself from a 'land-locked' to a 'land-linked' country. He concluded by highlighting that landlocked developing countries cannot and should not be locked in the vicious circle of underdevelopment.

106. **H.E. Mr. Satyajit Arjuna Rodrigo, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations** noted that the Secretary General's report indicates that while progress has been made in areas such as health, education and the empowerment of women and girls, there is still much to be done to achieve the targets set out in the VPoA. He continued that the Report illustrates that the growth rate of real GDP per capita in these countries has decreased, while inflation has increased. He also explained that the participation of LLDCs in global trade remains minimal, with their share of global merchandise exports falling to just 0.98% in 2018. He noted that climate change continues to pose a threat to the development initiatives of these countries, particularly impacting agriculture, while contributing to land degradation and desertification. He highlighted that as the member states move closer to reaching the deadline for achieving the targets in the 2030 Development Agenda, it is crucial that the member states collectively enhance their efforts to leave no one behind. He stressed that it is crucial that the member states seize this opportunity to not only identify the gaps and challenges in the Programme's implementation but also decide on the way forward.

107. Mr. Rodrigo indicated that Sri Lanka believes that building resilient infrastructure, particularly for transit transport, energy and information and communication technologies, would be crucial towards integrating LLDCs into the global economy and increase their competitiveness. He continued that strengthening their capacity to meet challenges arising out of climate change and boosting their agriculture sector will also enhance their development initiatives. He indicated that partnerships also play an important role in the development of LLDCs, from transit countries and development partners to civil society and youth. He concluded by reiterating his support to collective initiatives to ensure the progress of Landlocked Developing Countries.

108. **H.E. Mr. Satyendra Prasad, the Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations** informed that 100 million of the world's poorest people live in landlocked developing countries. The midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action must be used to take bold steps towards addressing the special development needs and challenges that hold these countries back. Economic growth has declined in the past five years, and their share of world trade has dropped from 2 per cent in 2014 to less than 1 per cent in 2019. Mr. Prasad stressed that like small island developing states, landlocked developing countries are highly exposed to the climate crisis, with extreme weather catastrophes such as desertification and cyclones harming both food security and livelihoods. To address this, he called for the building of resilient economies and societies that can respond to the adverse impact of climate change. The scale of climate finance must be substantially increased to give landlocked developing countries the opportunity to accelerate their adaptation. Mr. Prasad also identified high trade costs as another main challenge face by LLDCs and called

for technology and finance policies, in which the UN system can play a critical role. At the end of his statement, Mr. Prasad remarked that with help of long-term partners, LLDCs can pave way for innovative trade corridors, high speed information corridors, herald new corridors of renewable energy, technology and create corridors of sustainability and opportunity. He concluded by reiterating Fiji's continued support.

109. **Mr. Thomas Rathmell Woodroffe, Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of United Kingdom to the United Nations** re-affirmed the importance of collectively addressing the needs of countries facing special challenges in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda objectives. He emphasized that trade is a key component of sustainable development and that he wants to focus on three areas of how UK is supporting LLDCs. He noted that UK supports implementation of WTO facilitation agreement and helps LLDCs get access to sea ports. He also highlighted that UK gives comprehensive Aid for Trade progress and helps break down the barriers for trade by supporting crucial trade infrastructure. He continued that UK helps LLDCs build trade skills and help development of sustainable, modern, clean accessible energy which is critical for inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

110. Mr. Woodroffe stressed that UK established African Clean Energy Program for Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to give energy access to low income households by promoting market-based approach and adopting private sector delivery of services. He noted that low carbon energy access program gave four million people access to energy and UK has helped with low carbon technology. He continued that these measures also help tackle climate change. He explained that countries are not on the path to meet objectives of Paris Agreement. He shared that UK is planning to partner with Italy next year to accelerate the action, the first of which is to urge highest mitigation ambition. He continued that the second approach will be to promote climate finance and diversify FDI. He concluded by expressing that LLDCs can count on UK's continued to support.

111. **H.E. Mr. Philip Ochen Andrew Odida, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations** shared that his country has implemented policies that facilitate the free movement of people and other factors of production within the East African Community (EAC). He continued that in this regard, Uganda commenced issuance of the EAC Passport in January 2018. He indicated that a Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking system (RECTS) that serves Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda was launched in February 2017. He explained that the system is designed to enable a seamless flow of transit cargo with all the revenue collection authorities in the three countries having a single view of cargo along the northern corridor. He noted that this has resulted into reduced transit time from 6 to 3 days for regional, and 3 to 1.5 days for national transactions, improved truck turnaround time from 4 to 8 trips a month and suppressed transit diversion and improved trade facilitation. He next explained that with regard to transport infrastructure, Uganda has stepped up efforts to improve the quality of its transport network, the total KMs of paved road network in the country have increased to 4,551 kms.

112. Mr. Odida continued that major roads have also been developed to link the country to major border posts of the neighboring countries of Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and South Sudan. He highlighted that a Standard Gauge Railway project and network is being developed in collaboration with the EAC Partner States to operate as a modern, fast, reliable,

efficient and high capacity seamless single system. In preparation for the production of oil, construction of key oil roads and the Hoima International Airport are being fast-tracked as part of the crucial infrastructure required for the Oil and Gas industry. He noted that at the regional level, Uganda was among the first countries that signed and ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. He stressed that Uganda's economic transformation agenda is based on the National Development Plan (NDP). He explained that the second NDP running up to 2040 is currently under implementation. He continued that under the plan, three growth opportunities and two fundamentals have been identified as having the potential to push the country to middle income status. He indicated that the growth opportunities include; Agriculture, Tourism, minerals, oil and gas development, while the fundamental requirements remain infrastructure and human capital development. He stressed that Uganda believes that investment in the above opportunities and fundamentals would aim at maximizing sectoral linkages and increasing efficiency in resource use.

113. Mr. Odida explained that in terms of enabling policies, Uganda further launched the Coffee 2020 Roadmap targeting to increase coffee production to 20 million 60-kilogramme bags per annum. He noted that statistics indicate that exports earnings from coffee per year can increase to US\$1.5 billion from the current US\$ 439.2 million. He continued that the sector has the ability to attract more than \$ 1 billion dollars in financing and investment and improve the livelihoods of 1.2 million households who participate in the coffee value chain. He indicated that Uganda's domestic revenue mobilization efforts continue to be strengthened. He further explained that over the last decade, tax revenue has been growing at an average of 17 percent since 2007/08, while tax to GDP ratio, has been growing at an average of 0.2 percent compared to the annual target 0.5 percent. He highlighted that the government has directed its efforts towards widening the tax base and enhancing compliance. He shared that a Domestic Revenue Mobilization Strategy has been developed to inform reforms in the tax system both in the medium and long term. He concluded by stressing that the Vienna Programme and Uganda's national development plans are synchronized in timeframe of implementation. He stressed that the focus of NDPII is to strengthen the country's competitiveness for sustainable wealth creation, employment and inclusive growth embodies the principles of the Vienna Programme of Action.

114. **H.E. Mr. Xolisa Mfundiso Mabongo, Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations** underscored that progress in implementation of the VPoA has been mixed. Gains were made in areas such as ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by LLDCs and transit countries, deepening of regional integration and cooperation, improvements in road and rail corridor performance and growth in dry ports. On the other hand, in other areas there has been limited progress. One third of the LLDCs' population is still living in poverty and the LLDCs continue to account for less than one percent of the global trade. Also, there has been limited progress on structural economic transformation. Quality education would also need to be addressed. The challenges that obstruct the growth of LLDCs are inadequate quality and deficiencies in the physical infrastructure, lack of access to electricity and high costs of ICT services. Also, whilst most LLDCs have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, their implementation of the Agreement lags behind. In addition, Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows continue to be concentrated in a few LLDCs and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows have declined. It would be necessary to strengthen regional and continental integration to address these challenges.

115. Mr. Mabhongo underscored the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement in helping address the challenges. He noted that infrastructure development is crucial for LLDCs and stressed the role of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). He concluded by highlighting that South Africa, as a transit country, is playing an important role in facilitating regional integration through the SADC Protocol on trade by reducing customs duties and other barriers to trade amongst SADC Member States.

116. **Mr. Mohamed Traore, Second Counsellor of Permanent Mission of Mali to the United Nations**, shared that since 2012, Mali has experienced multiple crises that hindered Mali's government's efforts. He explained that despite the crises, Mali has been resilient and continued to implement priorities of development policy and programme with support from bilateral and multilateral partners. He shared that there is a means to bring together sectoral policy and regional local strategies to help promote inclusive and sustainable development and to reduce poverty and inequality. He explained that this incorporates VPoA's strategic component of economic sustainable growth. He indicated that Mali, as an agricultural country, feels the full impact of climate change, characterized by advancement of desertification, impact on fauna and flora, drying up of river and stream, and rising temperature. He stressed that the midterm review is an ideal opportunity to see the progress that has been made and the prospect for 2024. He emphasized the importance of identifying obstacles and constraints. He welcomed the holding of regional reviews. He continued that due to the assistance provided to Mali by UNCTAD to implement WTO trade facilitation program, trade logistics and customs clearance procedure have improved.

117. **H.E. Mr. Mauro Vieira, the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations** stressed the importance of support to enable LLDCs to overcome structural macroeconomic constraints and achieve their full economic and social potential. He explained that Brazil made contributions to the development of LLDCs through the provision of South-South cooperation. He explained that such initiatives have flourished in areas such as agriculture, education, health, capacity building, strengthening of local markets and technical cooperation, involving countries in need in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. He emphasized that South-South cooperation remains an important priority for the Brazilian Government, aimed at fostering sustainable development through human and institutional capacity building and at promoting structural changes to the socioeconomic reality of our partners. He expressed that he expects the comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action will renew collective political commitment to achieving progress in its six mutually reinforcing priority areas, as well as identifying remaining obstacles and constraints. He communicated that he also expects it to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through renewed means of implementation and the sharing of good practices and lessons learnt.

118. **Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt, Executive Director of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries**, explained that the International Think Tank participated the first time in the 2nd UN conference for LLDCs in 2014 when the VPoA was approved and the International Think Tank for LLDCs (ITT-LLDCs) contributed to the VPoA with its research. He continued that the ITT also actively contributed to the successful implementation of the VPoA through its research, seminars and participated in the Expert Group meetings and Inter-Agency Consultative Group meetings on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA. He explained

recent developments at the ITT-LLDCs. He indicated in 2018 the ITT-LLDCs successfully transformed from an organization under an interim management scheme to a fully operational intergovernmental organization for LLDCs. He continued that as of today, 14 LLDCs have acceded or ratified the multilateral agreement on the establishment of the ITT. He explained that the current member states of the ITT-LLDCs are Afghanistan, Armenia, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Paraguay, Tajikistan, Niger and Azerbaijan. He noted that taking this opportunity, he would like to congratulate the Government of Azerbaijan for its recent accession to the Multilateral Agreement and its commitments to the ITT. He indicated that after the entry into force of the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of the ITT-LLDCs on 6 October 2017, the Board of Governors of the ITT was established, which consists of representatives from all member states that are party to the multilateral agreement, and organized its first meeting in May 2018.

119. Mr. Erdenetsogt indicated that on June 2018, the intergovernmental inaugural meeting of the ITT-LLDCs was successfully organized in cooperation with the Government of Mongolia and UN-OHRLLS. He explained that the Meeting was not only a symbolic event for the inauguration of the ITT, but was a platform for thematic multilateral discussions on issues of relevance to LLDCs such as foreign direct investment and economic diversification of LLDCs; ICT connectivity and LLDCs; and infrastructure development, transit transport corridors and trade facilitation. He stressed that this year ITT-LLDCs finalized the comprehensive study on the Economic diversification of LLDCs with the case study of four countries, namely Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal and Paraguay, which has already contributed to the Priority 5 Structural Economic Transformation of the VPoA. He explained that the ITT-LLDCs work very closely with the United Nations' system organizations, such UN-OHRLLS, UN-ESCAP, UNCTAD and WIPO to tackle challenges in implementation of the VPoA. He noted some examples of ITT's cooperation in support of LLDCs. He explained that in 2018, there was a sub-regional workshop on "Fostering Structural Transformation and Export Diversification in Selected Asian Landlocked Developing Countries" as part of a capacity-building project to promote structural transformation and export diversification in energy-exporting LLDCs in Asia in collaboration with UNCTAD. He continued that in 2019, there was the inter-regional meeting on "Partnership for innovation and technological capacity building for the Landlocked developing countries and landlocked least developed countries" in cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Intellectual Property Office of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar.

120. Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt also explained that the ITT-LLDCs also contributed and moderated Session #4 titled "Strengthening legal frameworks for corridor operations" of the Meeting on Best Practices in Corridor Development and Management for the Benefit of LLDCs and Transit Countries, which was organized by the UN-OHRLLS and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia on October, 2019 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. He lastly highlighted that the ITT just concluded two events, namely "Sub-regional Workshop on ICT Co-deployment along Transport Infrastructure in East and North East Asia Subregion" and Mongolia's Expert Capacity Building Workshop on "Addressing 2030 Agenda through Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific" in collaboration with the UN-ESCAP. He concluded by re-emphasizing ITT's commitment to the cause of LLDCs and called on landlocked developing countries that have not yet ratified the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an ITT-LLDCs to do so at its earliest convenience and ask development partners and Friends of LLDCs to support and

effectively utilize the ITT-LLDCs for sharing experiences and know-how, research and addressing challenges in implementing both the VPoA and SDGs as noted in the Article 64 (j) of the VPoA.

121. **H.E. Mr. Ahmed Amdel-Latif, Permanent Observer for the International Renewable Energy Agency**, shared that while the average proportion of the population with access to electricity in LLDCs has increased, from 49.5 percent in 2014 to 56.3 percent in 2017, LLDCs still lag behind the world average of 88.8 percent. Renewable energy can help these States tackle that access gap, as renewable forms now represent the lowest-cost source of new power generation in most of the world. For its part, he indicated that the Agency is committed to supporting LLDCs in harnessing these vast benefits. Readiness assessments have already been successfully conducted in nine of the countries. The Agency is also deploying policy advice and capacity-building through regional road maps and action plans in Central Asia and Central Africa.

122. Mr. Amdel-Latif informed that IRENA is moving towards further strengthening its support to countries on the ground to mobilize investments and scale up projects, through new partnerships and initiatives. To illustrate, the Climate Investment Platform initiative supports countries in enhancing their NDCs and to facilitate access to de-risked financial resources. Furthermore, IRENA is also making efforts to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations in support of LLDCs. Specifically, Last September, the Director-General of IRENA and the UN High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDSs signed a Memorandum of Understanding to step up cooperation regarding the implementation of the energy component of the VPoA.

123. **H.E. Ms. Zodwa Mabuza, Principal Regional Integration Officer of the African Development Bank** stated that transport corridors stimulate trade and economic development. She stressed that the bank provides financial support for the implementation of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and other corridors not covered under PIDA. PIDA is a continent-wide program to develop a programme for the development of priority regional and continental infrastructure in transport and energy. In 2019, support to regional transport projects amounted to \$860 million and this includes Kazungula Bridge project, Mauritania–Senegal Rosso Bridge, Senegambia Bridge, Eldoret bypass, Coyah–Farmoreah border road between Guinea and Sierra Leone, the construction of a bridge over the Logone River between Yagoua, Cameroon, and Bongor, Chad.

124. Ms. Zodwa Mabuza highlighted some efforts made by AfDB including financing of OSBPs, Intermodal Connectivity and support for the Online NTB Reporting and Monitoring Mechanism. Also, the Bank supports PIDA and a number of regional and continental initiatives such as Capacity Support for NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency, Tripartite Capacity Building Project and supported AfCTA through a grant of \$4.8 million for institutional arrangements. Furthermore, she emphasized that the Bank is making efforts to transform African economies from predominantly trading in commodities to final products. Ms. Zodwa Mabuza also acknowledged some challenges such as limited funding for financing infrastructure, poor capital/financial markets, complex border procedures, poor maintenance of existing infrastructure and low implementation rate of the Trade Facilitation Measures.

VI. High-level Panel on challenges and opportunities for the VPoA and its interlinkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

125. In her remarks, **H.E. Ms. Mona Juul, President of ECOSOC** indicated that overcoming the unique challenges faced by LLDCs is a priority for the Economic and Social Council. She explained that this priority is very much in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its emphasis on countries in special situations. She explained that the sustainable development of LLDCs will be a crucial part of the decade of action and delivery. She noted that the recent SDG Summit called for accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. She stressed that the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs must guide revitalized efforts of the international community to achieve these goals.

126. Ms. Juul indicated that the 2030 Agenda addresses several key priorities of LLDCs, including: facilitating sustainable and resilient infrastructure development, providing transport systems, ensuring economic diversification, technological growth and innovation and not least, strengthening the means of implementation. She explained that so far, progress in the achievement of the SDGs in LLDCs has been mixed. She elaborated that there are some encouraging results such as the fact that in 2005 the proportion of people in LLDCs below the international poverty line was 42% and this fell to 30% by 2015. She indicated that this is certainly great progress, but still leaves a third of people in LLDCs in poverty. She also noted that more and more people in LLDCs have access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. She explained that nevertheless this number is still only half the rate of the global average. She continued that progress has also been recorded in health and education related indicators- as well as on gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls.

127. Ms. Juul indicated that in 2020, ECOSOC will provide a number of opportunities to focus on the priorities of the LLDCs, including the Financing for Development Forum, and the Development Cooperation Forum. She explained that these occasions will provide platforms for reality-based, action-oriented and results focused discussions between all Member States and relevant stakeholders. She continued that in July 2020, 50 countries - including 13 LLDCs - will present their voluntary national reviews at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and report on their progress towards achieving the SDGs. She expressed that it is truly encouraging to see how actively engaged many of the LLDCs are in the VNR process. She emphasized that the VNRs present an important opportunity for LLDCs to learn from each other, and from other countries. She continued that the VNR process is also a unique opportunity for countries to start a conversation on a shared sustainable development vision with all parts of their own government and society. She concluded by stressing that through our joint efforts, we can deliver on the global commitment at the heart of the 2030 Agenda - to leave no one behind, and to reach those furthest behind first.

128. In her remarks **Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative and Under-Secretary-General** explained that the 2030 Agenda recognizes the special needs and challenges faced by LLDCs and stresses the need for the international community to support the development efforts of LLDCs. She indicated that the World Leaders noted that the VPoA is integral part of the

2030 Agenda. She stressed that effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the SDGs are mutually self-reinforcing.

129. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu explained that on the one hand, the Vienna Programme of Action helps turn the attention to context-specific challenges of LLDCs, for instance trade facilitation and regional integration, all of which are more or less silent in the 2030 Agenda but are central to the sustainable development of the LLDCs. She continued that on the other hand, the 2030 Agenda complement the Vienna Programme of Action by delving more in the specifics, covering social development issues—including poverty, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation and full employment—as well as issues of environmental sustainability, peace, justice and strong institutions, which are all determining success factors to all priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action. She highlighted that both agendas implemented together, will help advance LLDCs’ development, including on trade, sustainable energy, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, transport systems, economic diversification and industrialization, regional economic integration and interconnectivity, technological growth and innovation, means of implementation and capacity building on statistics.

130. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu stressed that the midterm review meeting is an important occasion to assess where we stand, draw some lessons and chart out a way forward. She explained that it is the culmination of more than a year-long preparation. She highlighted that OHRLLS worked together with the rest of the UN system, partner institutions and Member States, to organize a series of pre-conference events and undertake comprehensive analyses of the progress, constraints, and challenges on the implementation of the VPoA. She explained that many LLDCs prepared national reports and three regional review meetings were held for the Euro and Asia region; Africa region and Latin America region. She noted that all these activities collectively informed the midterm review with on-the-ground perspectives of the achievements and constraints faced by the LLDCs.

131. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu noted that tangible progress and achievements have been made on most of the VPoA priority areas since 2014. She explained that together with their transit partners, LLDCs have made important gains in upgrading railways, roads, ports, air transport and inland waterways, as well as building and utilizing corridors. She indicated that the high ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by LLDCs and transit countries means that the LLDCs are poised to yield greater improvements in transit time if the Agreement is fully implemented. She highlighted that progress was made to improve energy and ICT connectivity of the LLDCs as can be seen from the fact that interest in regional integration and cooperation grew among LLDCs. She continued that some agreements reached over the review period include the Eurasian Economic Union, African Continental Free Trade Area, and several other multilateral agreements such as the China, Mongolia and Russian Federation economic corridor to mention just a few. She explained that efforts are also being made on diversification and upgrading of their economies, export promotion and private sector development. She highlighted that there was some increase in ODA support to LLDCs over the review period. She emphasized that as we can see from this Midterm Review Meeting, the commitment to the Vienna Programme is strong.

132. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu emphasized that it should be made clear that despite this progress, we are far from where we need to be to successfully turn LLDCs into land-linked countries. She explained that there are many challenges that continue to impede progress that must be addressed with

urgency. She indicated that there are also opportunities that have potential to significantly improve the situation. She highlighted that the LLDCs account for about 509 million people, which is some 7 per cent of the world's population. She continued that they live on about 22 per cent of the total global land area.

133. Ms. 'Utoikamanu noted that LLDCs continue to be marginalized from global trade, as their share of global merchandise exports declined to below 1 per cent in 2018. She explained that this is a critical issue as it is linked in some measure to the LLDC's continuing high costs to export and import. She stressed that physical connectivity - the hard infrastructure, trade facilitation and the soft infrastructure and making infrastructure climate-resilient are fundamental issues that must be tackled if we truly wish to see the integration of LLDCs into global trade. She continued that at the same time, much more needs to be done to ensure that progress is made on trade facilitation, in particular to build the capacity of LLDCs and transit countries to implement their Trade Facilitation Agreements.

134. Ms. 'Utoikamanu explained that the LLDCs have struggled with adding value to their exports as most of them are still dependent on exports of primary commodities, leaving them vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations. She emphasized that new and rapidly evolving technologies and innovative solutions offer unprecedented opportunities for social, economic and environmental advancement of LLDCs. She also stressed that technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, big data, digitalization and renewable energy technologies are available. She explained that diffusion of these technologies to LLDCs will continue to be critical. She also explained that deforestation, land degradation, desertification, droughts, melting of glaciers, environmental degradation and disasters continue to undermine LLDCs' efforts to achieve the objectives of the VPoA and the SDGs. She indicated that these can be tackled by bringing together adaptation, mitigation and development strategies in a coherent way that will enhance opportunities for low-carbon and climate-resilient development.

135. Ms. Fekitamoelea Katoa 'Utoikamanu noted that the High-level declaration clearly notes the challenges in regular collection and analysis of data to monitor and report on some of the specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action. She highlighted that the 2030 Agenda calls for provision of capacity-building support on statistics for developing countries including LLDCs, including the strengthening of national data systems. She explained that there is clearly potential to coordinate to support the advancement of LLDCs in this area. She further explained that the financing needs of LLDCs are substantial, in particular towards infrastructure development and maintenance. She emphasized that national governments, development partners, international financial institutions, development banks and the private sector all have a significant role to play in scaling up their contributions to sustainable development financing. She called on the need to seize the momentum from this Midterm Review to revitalize partnerships to support the LLDCs. She emphasized the need to work to integrate LLDC issues prominently in the follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda, including Financing for Development Forum, the High-Level Political Forum. She concluded by stressing that greater forging of synergies between the Vienna Programme and other global frameworks, such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the New Urban Agenda; and the Paris Agreement; is critical since these are opportunities to address the special needs of the LLDCs in a more holistic and integrated manner.

136. In his remarks **H.E. Mr. José Antonio dos Santos, Vice Minister of foreign affairs of Paraguay and Chair of LLDCs** indicated that Agenda 2030 for sustainable development was designed to indicate to countries in general without consideration of GDP or particular domestic situation on how countries could move toward more wealthy, resilient society and at the same time be respectful of the environment. He explained that not all states share the same aspiration in terms of the development nor do they have identical needs. He noted that each country works from different starting points and work according to where they stand in terms of progress and build on the 2030 Agenda bearing those things in mind. He indicated that LLDCs, given their unique geographical situation face additional challenges which hinder their movements toward sustainable development. He highlighted that there is sufficient evidence to believe that there is a link between a lack of coastline and poor performance in terms of administering countries' wealth and providing inclusive well-being to all people. He stressed the need to produce tailor made programs designed to meet unique needs of these countries such as the VPoA. He noted that nevertheless they are largely focused on problems that are strategic and commercial in nature and concerns and questions such as trade facilitation and freedom of movement. He continued that all measures are designed to make economies more competitive.

137. Mr. dos Santos stressed that states must be able to design appropriate, political public policy to transform wealth into development that strengthens rights. He highlighted that this is where the relevance of 2030 Agenda comes in which indicates sectors that states should earmark. He explained that the VPoA came before the 2030 Agenda and the latter aims to move all global efforts in the same direction by defining 17 areas that must be pooled. He stressed the importance of aligning the VPoA with 2030 Agenda since the first agenda only deals with increasing economic competitiveness but does not deal with using and earmarking wealth produced to generate sustainable development.

138. Mr. dos Santos expressed that the midterm review is important since it tackles how to overcome obstacles to turn wealth into well-being for all citizens and be respectful of the environment. He stressed two points, one of which is the international governance. He secondly called upon tailor-made solutions. He explained that channeling expenditure to better performance in areas indicated in the SDGs is crucial. He stressed that in LLDCs, monitoring progress in areas that they are lagging behind in is insufficient due to deficiency in statistical systems. He explained that the state does not understand international, regional and global level development indicators. He stressed the importance of aligning the VPoA, regional integration and other projects such as the Free Trade Agreement in line with the Agenda 2030.

139. Mr. dos Santos indicated that there are international groups with local ramifications that adopted anti UN stance that tarnish the work of the United Nations output. He explained that these groups led to decrease in well-being. He stressed that the fallacious remarks about the work of UN should be debunked to protect the noble goals of the UN. He also stressed the importance of stimulating research and innovation in LLDCs. He indicated that we should not settle down for current research but work arduously to foster new research and new development. He stressed that not leaving anyone behind is important but reaching those who are farthest away is also very important and everyone's basic needs should be satisfied. He concluded by calling upon the efforts to help the most marginalized that do not possess the tools for development.

140. In his remarks, **Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, commissioner of the UN Broadband Commission for Development and advisor to three United Nations Secretaries-General** cited a quote by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* (1776): “As by means of water-carriage a more extensive market is opened to every sort of industry than what land-carriage alone can afford it, so it is upon the sea-coast, and along the banks of navigable rivers, that industry of every kind naturally begins to subdivide and improve itself, and it is frequently not till a long time after that those improvements extend themselves to the inland parts of the country. The commerce besides which any nation can carry on by means of a river which does not break itself into any great number of branches or canals, and which runs into another territory before it reaches the sea, can never be very considerable; because it is always in the power of the nations who possess that other territory to obstruct the communication between the upper country and the sea.”

141. Professor Sachs noted that what Adam Smith wants to point out is that the two basic realities of being landlocked are high cost of transport and the neighboring countries. He continued that it is about politics and a matter of regional cooperation and physical infrastructure. He highlighted that we do not have 32 specific cases to address but have few regional challenges to address. He indicated that two largest both in area and population are Central Asian Group and the Saharan Group which are two biggest challenges for the LLDCs. He explained that there are ten interconnected landlocked Sub-Saharan countries which are Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Ethiopia. He continued that there are eight interconnected and contiguous Central Asian countries such as Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

142. Professor Sachs stressed that it is a matter of two major regions with most of the challenges and it cannot be solved country by country and with small effort. He emphasized that it requires large, significant and coordinated efforts by the regions and in both cases, there are solutions. He indicated that for Central Asian challenges, the Belt and Road initiative of China is the most relevant initiative. He continued that Europe and China should work together to support the countries in the middle in modern infrastructure such as renewable energy, fiber and rail transport. He indicated that the Belt and Road initiative is the boldest, best conceived large-scale infrastructure project in the world. He called upon Europe to partner with China on this initiative and stressed that this would address tremendously the needs of Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan Azerbaijan, and Armenia which are located right on the route between East Asia and Europe.

143. Professor Sachs explained that when it comes to Sahara, there are poorest countries on planet which are prone to numerous factors deterring development. He continued that landlockedness is one aspect and the other aspect is physical geography, which is extremely difficult and is exemplified by arid regions beset by a range of infectious diseases, long distance of transport, major climate crisis and major food insecurity. He emphasized that these problems will not be solved by small scale, symbolic effort. He indicated that they require major investment in Saharan region but despite a lot of programmes, financing isn't there. He stressed that China and EU have a co-responsibility and co-need to help finance major infrastructure in Sahara. He noted that the best sunshine is both a curse and a blessing. He explained that the Sahara region has the highest

potential of solar power in the world. He continued that solar energy is for the people of Sahara and also for export. He highlighted that there should be a long-distance transmission system for this and China has the technology and the financing to help provide that. He also noted that Europe which will launch decarbonization programme next week also can be the beneficiary.

144. Professor Sachs stressed that we should not view this as a matter of good will but as vast regions that require major investment. He noted that this investment is what we promised to make and also that will lead to ample return socially and commercially. He indicated that this will also require large political backing and cooperation of Europe and China. He also encouraged cooperation from Japan and Korea. He concluded by stressing the need for investment at large scale and highlighted that these efforts will lead to global development and peace.

VII. Interactive Panel on promoting trade, trade facilitation and structural economic transformation in Landlocked Developing Countries

145. The interactive panel on “Promoting trade, trade facilitation and structural economic transformation in Landlocked Developing Countries” was moderated by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General, UN-OHRLS and featured presentations by Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP; Mr. Yonov Frederick Agah, Deputy Director General, World Trade Organization (WTO); Ms. Fatou Haidara, Managing Director, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary-General, World Customs Organization (WCO); and Mr. Paul Akiwumi, Director for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

146. In her opening remarks Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, highlighted that the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA), which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, agreed on ambitious trade targets and that the VPoA foresees a significant increase in the participation of LLDCs in global trade as well as strengthened value added and manufacturing components of exports of LLDCs. She noted that midway through the implementation of the VPoA the set targets continued to be ever more in further reach. She highlighted that the LLDCs’ share of merchandise export had declined from about 1.2 per cent in 2013 to 0.98 per cent in 2018 and that their exports continued to be concentrated on a few commodities, mostly natural resources, exported at low value addition and low technology content. She expressed concern that the heavy dependence on commodities made LLDCs vulnerable to shocks, price fluctuations and the impacts of climate change and that these undermined the efforts of LLDCs to accelerate sustainable development and benefit from regional, global flows of knowledge, technology, capital and innovation.

147. In his intervention, **Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP** highlighted that LLDCs had made significant progress since the adoption of the VPoA in 2014 however noted that the progress had been uneven both amongst countries and across priority areas of action. He noted that this was compounded by multiple development challenges faced by LLDCs and the fact that almost half of LLDCs are also Least Developed Countries (LDCs). He reiterated that LLDC’s economies were dependent on a small number of export commodities, accounted for 1 per cent of global exports and were therefore vulnerable to external shocks. He thus emphasized that transformation required large-scale investment in transport and logistics infrastructure as well as economic and export diversification which would lead to better integration in global and regional trade and value chains.

148. He emphasized that it was important to consider that there were “adjustment costs” to structural transformation and large shifts of factors of production across sectors and noted that there was need for equitable and sustainable transformation which supports decarbonization and climate action. He stressed that it was also vital that structural transformation was equitable and sustainable across groups and generations. He accentuated that the national policies and development interventions need to be mindful of the impact of changes to the most vulnerable groups including their ability; or lack thereof -- to participate; and benefit from; the changes and as such integrated policy approaches were vital to ensure equitable outcomes -- including sustained investments in skills for youth and women. Structural transformation should also help LLDCs to transition to low carbon and more environmentally sustainable and resilient economies in line with the SDGs.

149. He stressed the need to align efforts by governments, private sector and civil society in a “whole of government approach” to change the growth trajectory of national economies. He also stressed that deepening economic integration was necessary for LLDCs to achieve structural transformation and therefore reducing trade costs and facilitating connectivity were crucial. He noted that integration in world trade had been facilitated by the expansion of global value chains which allowed developing more benefits from their participation in world trade. He warned that there were both risks and opportunities brought by the tremendous and rapid changes produced by the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution” including the adoption of digital technologies such artificial intelligence, blockchain and 3D printing could bring divergence. He informed that UNDP’s new Human Development Report highlighted the need to avoid a “new great divergence” driven by artificial intelligence and digital technologies. He recalled historical precedent for technological revolutions to carve deep, persistent inequalities -- as took place in the Industrial Revolution and he therefore advised that use of new technology should be guided to be a force for human development progress.

150. Mr. Steiner highlighted that communication evolution under technology development was a catalyst for trade facilitation and he indicated that mobile payment trend and micro finance economy are trends in which digital technology serves as game-changer. He advised that it was important for LLDCs to think through how they can participate in and benefit from the emerging digital economy trends. He further advised that LLDCs must also be supported to respond to the challenges of climate change -- which brings risks for global value chains, as highly traded and labour-intensive value chains which many developing countries have used as a “springboard” for light manufacturing and job creation were most likely to be highly disrupted. He emphasized that regional integration offers tremendous opportunities to developing countries to harness trade integration for structural transformation and that the entry into force of the Africa continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) was a case in point. He noted that if successfully implemented, the Agreement will connect 1.3 billion people, create a US \$3.4 trillion economic bloc, and accelerate commerce within the continent.

151. Mr. Steiner noted that while geography cannot be changed, LLDCs and partners could work together towards turning location into opportunities through integrated policy approaches and strong partnerships. He expressed UNDP’s commitment to continue to work alongside partners in LLDCs to help address their unique development needs and seize opportunities to accelerate

sustainable development. He indicated that UNDP had just rolled-out 60 Accelerator Labs serving 78 countries and the Labs seek to identify local solutions which can then be scaled-up quickly. He gave an example of such solutions as farmer discovering a new way to irrigate his crops or a woman inventing a way to channel solar energy for cleaner fuel. He indicated that 18 LLDCs were involved in the initiative. He also informed the UNDP was stepping-up its efforts in facilitating access and aligning public and private finance with the SDGs through the SDG Finance Sector Hub. He explained that the UNDP's flagship SDG Impact initiative would provide businesses and investors with much-needed country-level data and SDG investment roadmaps. Such initiatives are a crucial part of the drive towards introducing innovative financial models and leveraging more effective resources -- from governments, international financial institutions and even private sector partners -- to help advance structural economic transformation in LLDCs.

152. **Mr. Yonov Frederick Agah, Deputy Director General, World Trade Organization (WTO)** highlighted that LLDCs were a very important constituency of the WTO and that trade was very important for them as was a strong Multilateral Trading System. He noted that the LLDCs have very characteristic constraints due to their geographical challenges that affect their ability to participate in international trade and WTO was aware of the LLDCs challenges and was working to address their challenges hence the WTO was one of the main implementation partners for the VPoA and cooperates very closely with OHRLLS to help LLDCs integrate into the multilateral trading system. He noted that the multilateral trading system that is overseen by the WTO plays a very important role in supporting inclusive growth, jobs and poverty reduction in LLDCs through the promotion of trade led structural economic transformation as well as by fostering economic growth, the efficient reallocation of resources, exploitation of scale economies, technology spillovers, and raising living standards, trade and income levels, and to enhance the structural economic transformation of LLDCs.

153. Mr. Agah highlighted that trade and the WTO had contributed significantly to the unprecedented economic development that had taken place in the last decade and noted that trade had allowed many developing countries to benefit from the opportunities created by emerging new markets, to integrate into the world market through global value chains at lower costs and to reap the rewards from higher world commodity prices. He further highlighted that the WTO had played a key role by providing certainty regarding the commitments of its members, thereby creating a predictable environment that allowed economic activity to flourish and had also given flexibilities to developing countries to address their specific economic needs. He emphasized that trade works for developing countries, including the LLDCs, as opening up to trade increases a country's economic growth as it allows each country to use its resources more efficiently by specializing in the production of the goods and services it can produce more competitively.

154. Mr. Agah highlighted that by increasing growth, trade could also make available the necessary resources to implement other development targets in the social and environmental sphere and achieve structural economic transformation and contribute directly to poverty reduction. He noted that integration into the multilateral trading system also helps the long-term growth prospects of developing countries by providing them with access to new markets, new technologies and new investment, making their development sustainable. He however noted that for countries to fully reap the benefits of trade, it was necessary to adopt approaches to mainstream trade into

their national sustainable development strategies in view of the crosscutting nature of trade in the economy.

155. On the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), he highlighted that the full implementation of the Agreement has been estimated to reduce trade costs in LLDCs by 15.4% on average. He noted that the TFA was also expected to help developing countries in some key areas for their sustainable development and could help member's efforts on export diversification by enhancing their capacity to participate in global value chains and lower the entry barriers for small firms to join international trade. He emphasized that by making customs procedures more efficient and transparent the TFA helps countries generate more customs revenues and lower the incidence of corruption.

156. He highlighted that the multilateral trading system, under the WTO serves as a watch-dog in facilitating smoother and freer trade among the nations and thus contributing to higher incomes, raising living standards thus making a positive contribution towards reducing poverty and inequalities. He noted that one of the core principles that underpin the functioning of the multilateral trading system is that of non-discrimination. He emphasized the most-favoured nation and national treatment provisions of the WTO prohibit arbitrary discrimination amongst trading partners and ensure inclusive approach to sharing of benefits of trade concessions among all and stressed that these benefits should not be taken for granted, especially when multilateralism is under threat. He accentuated that for WTO to keep working, delivering on development and the implementation of the VPoA, the system needs to be supported and strengthened. He recalled that the WTO was faced with challenges and the challenges put into question the WTO's ability to keep on functioning as it had in the past. He noted that there was an increase in trade restrictive measures and the impasse over the selection of Appellate Body judges which threatened to paralyze the dispute settlement mechanism. He emphasized the need to work hard to strengthen mechanisms of cooperation and build confidence in the multilateral trading system. He advised that just sitting back and letting the trade war play-out or to let the Dispute Settlement Mechanism succumb to paralysis, was not an option. He warned that the economic impact of inaction could be damaging and long-lasting and as such the only way to strengthen the system was to make it evolve. He however informed that WTO Members had already started working on the task which was in general referred to as WTO reform or modernization.

157. He noted that the efforts for reform cover all the main functions of the organization. On dispute settlement and addressing the impasse in the appointments to the Appellate Body he highlighted that a well-functioning Dispute Settlement Mechanism benefits the smaller members, such as the LLDCs, that rely on the rule of law to defend their interests. He emphasized the need for all Members to continue to speak up in support for finding a solution to the paralysis. He highlighted that another area under discussion regarding the WTO reform was on improving the regular work of the WTO's councils and committees. He informed that several members insisted on the need to improve transparency among the membership's trade policies but cautioned that while it was important that members meet their obligations on transparency and notifications, the ongoing conversations should also recognize that some members may need assistance to do so.

158. The other area he briefed the meeting on was the ongoing negotiations at the WTO. He highlighted that in the short term the key multilateral test is the negotiations on fisheries subsidies.

He emphasized that to the WTO, the issue was not just a trade issue but was a sustainable development issue and was part of the SDGs. He noted that while the substantive issue of fisheries subsidies was of limited relevance to LLDCs, its importance lay in that fact that failing to successfully conclude these negotiations would not just be bad for marine fish stock but would damage the credibility of the WTO and discredit the feasibility of multilateral rule-making, which has greatly helped the LLDCs for example through the Trade Facilitation Agreement. He further informed that another important issue that made it to the top of the agenda was the question of who should continue to benefit from Special and Differential treatment and he highlighted that some members were of the view that eligibility for special and differential treatment should be determined before any negotiations start while other feel that potential flexibilities, and the extent to which members can use them, should be part of a negotiation and others were of the view that the current system should continue. He recalled that the Trade Facilitation Agreement, where LLDCs played a crucial role in shaping its rules, showed that functional, good-faith solutions were possible. He stressed that it was therefore imperative to pursue the dialogue in a way that is not unnecessarily divisive including in the discussions on WTO reform. He noted that the reform should be a constant process of adapting to economic conditions and responding to members' concerns and that every change to WTO rules and procedures was part of reform.

159. Regarding the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference he informed that work had already started in defining more concretely the outcomes for the Ministerial Conference to be held in Kazakhstan. He indicated that some longstanding issues such as agriculture and food security, for example, continued to be on the docket as items that need to be addressed. He indicated that some like-minded members have also started to pursue Joint Initiatives on e-commerce, investment facilitation, small businesses, women's economic empowerment and domestic regulation in services. He highlighted that the initiatives should have a strong development component as they could help make trade more inclusive – and many developing and least-developed had signed up. He also highlighted that some other members were of the view that the WTO should finish the work on issues that were mandated in Doha before embarking on any discussions of other issues. He advised that the LLDCs should take advantage that this is the first time a WTO Ministerial Conference was being held in an LLDC and make their voices heard, and come up with proposal for concrete deliverables which would help them integration into the multilateral trading system. He noted that many members were looking towards the Ministerial Conference as a possible target for delivering some tangible outcomes on reform.

160. In conclusion he indicated that the discussions on WTO reform reflect members' recognition of the need to make the multilateral trading system more inclusive, equitable and transparent, including addressing the challenges faced in decision making with such a diverse membership. He highlighted that the decisions that members would take on these issues would determine the future of the global trading system and its potential to keep driving development and equally, a failure to confront the issues would also determine the path forward in what could be a very negative way. He emphasized that the world needs the WTO and the Multilateral Trading System more than ever and that without the WTO, the global economy faces a future of uncertainty, trade war, lower growth, lower salaries and diminished job opportunities everywhere – in both poor and powerful countries alike. He advised that Members must use the moment of crisis to strengthen global cooperation on trade, which was ultimately in the interest of all and remained a crucial element in the attainment of the Vienna Program of Action and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

161. **Ms. Fatou Haidara, Managing Director, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** indicated that UNIDO was the specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development for poverty reduction, inclusive globalization and environmental sustainability. She indicated that LLDCs continued to make efforts to have industrialization at the core of their development strategies but noted that more work needed to be done to meet the goals of the VPoA. She highlighted that the industrialization gap between LLDCs and other developing countries could partly be attributed to the LLDCs structural vulnerabilities, the absence of adequate infrastructure in transport, logistics, energy, ICT as well as other factors such as slow regional integration and limited access to quality infrastructure. She noted that these structural factors had contributed to the low levels of the LLDC's share in global trade and therefore addressing the LLDCs challenges requires a more holistic approach for structural economic transformation to allow them to benefit from globalization. She emphasized the need for creating enabling business climate, build the capacity to export, and as well as building industrial infrastructure such as industrial parks and economic zones in LLDCs. She stressed that right policies, infrastructure, skills and a level playing field were also key elements for a conducive investment climate as well as trade facilitation and trade capacity building, technology transfer and fostering innovation. She indicated that UNIDO supported LLDCs through dedicated trade facilitation and trade capacity building programmes and innovative partnerships.

162. She highlighted that the ability of LLDCs to exploit trade opportunities and to access markets was hampered by the absence of competitive supply capacities and compliance infrastructure and therefore the focus should be on: building capacity for effective trade and quality policy making, and providing advice on trade related policies; strengthening the regional and national quality infrastructures; supporting productive sectors to produce goods that meet international requirements; promoting food safety and consumer, environmental, social and health protection, taking into account gender equality and women economic empowerment. She highlighted that UNIDO's programme for economic competitiveness, Trade Capacity Building, provided solutions in the framework of the Aid-For-Trade Initiative to access global markets. She informed that UNIDO teams up with governments, international organizations, representatives of the public and the private sectors, financial institutions, academia and civil society to: enhance standardization, quality, accreditation, metrology and conformity assessment services; enable SMEs to participate in global value chains, including modernizing agro-industries to increase their export potential; increase the ability of SMEs to compete in export markets, including forming export oriented consortia; and develop systems to improve knowledge management and assessment of market trends.

163. On UNIDO's innovative partnership approaches she highlighted that UNIDO had been piloting a new model of country-level engagement based on partnerships and aimed at leveraging private investment, namely the Programme for Country Partnership (PCP). She informed that the PCP was an innovative tool to support Member States to achieve long-term inclusive and sustainable industrial development and meeting SDG 9, industry, innovation and infrastructure. She reported that Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Zambia and Rwanda were some of the LLDC participating in the PCP. She highlighted some of the key features of the PCPs as: country ownership; alignment with national priorities; creation of synergies among partners; enhancing partnerships with the private sector, multilateral and development finance institutions. She also highlighted that through

PCPs technical assistance was linked to investments and that it supported governments in mobilizing large-scale industrial investments from both public and private partners.

164. In concluding her remarks, she highlighted that the 4th Industrial Revolution with its rapid advances in technology such as Artificial Intelligence, block chains, and Internet of Things, amongst others, could further widen technology and digital gaps. She called the meetings' attention to the UNIDO's Industrial Development Report 2020 entitled "Industrializing in the digital age" which contributes to the debate. She reiterated the SG's call to "join forces to help the world's 32 LLDCs achieve sustainable transformations and better standards of living and expressed UNIDO's commitment to join forces with partners to: promote innovative industrial policies; advance enabling business environments; support infrastructure, human capital, technology and institutional capacity building; foster private-public partnerships; and stimulate innovative financing, including blended finance.

165. **Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary-General, World Customs Organization (WCO)** informed that World Customs Organization, with its 183 members, sets standard guidelines for customs procedure, promote international cooperation and provide technical and capacity building assistance to the members. He explained that all 32 LLDCs were World Customs Organization's members and therefore WCO discussions also focus on how LLDCs challenges could be turned to opportunities. He highlighted that while customs facilitate movement of goods across borders it also has the responsibility to protect the society from illicit trade and therefore implementation of risk management was fundamental. He indicated that getting commercial data in advance as well as developing partnership with legitimate and compliant businesses was necessary to improve compliance and could improve economic competitiveness of the countries concerned.

166. He indicated that all their best practices are incorporated in the International Convention on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures or Revised Kyoto Convention. He also indicated that most of the high-level standards were also incorporated in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. He emphasized the importance of regional integration and stressed that it should be based on procedures in line with global standards.

167. Mr. Mikuriya highlighted that LLDCs should be the major beneficiaries of the WTO Trade facilitation Agreement. He informed that the WCO had developed a transit handbook that was launched during the Vienna Conference in 2014 and had continued to work in transit area because it was the key area to connect LLDCs to global markets. He further informed that WCO organized global transit conference in 2017 to launch transit guidelines that are not binding but give good overview of what should be done to have efficient and effective transit systems. He indicated that since the launch of the transit guidelines, they had been organizing seminars to disseminate content of the guidelines and also collect information on best practices. He indicated that WCO was working on developing a transit compendium of best practices.

168. Mr. Mikuriya stressed that to facilitate trade, the use of technology was inevitable, especially information and communications technology. He emphasized the importance of sharing of information between neighboring countries. He also emphasized the importance of connecting border agencies and that this agency should act in a coordinated manner. He therefore stressed that information technology was important to achieve this and implementing single window is

necessary. He emphasized the importance of standardized data. He explained that WCO developed a data model, a standardized data set, that addressed not only customs requirement but requirement of all government agencies. He informed that most countries are using the WTO data model.

169. Mr. Mikuriya stressed that the use of transport corridors was also important for LLDCs and he emphasized that it was therefore important to ensure that the supply chain functions well. He emphasized the importance of undertaking Time Release Studies to measure efficiency of border procedures and to identify bottlenecks. He stressed that it was useful to identify whether the bottlenecks were caused by custom inefficiency or inefficiency of other agencies or due to problems of private sector or infrastructure. In conclusion, Mr. Mikuriya called upon leaders to support customs reforms and stressed that the SDGs were important to the World Customs Organization. He explained that every year, the organization sets a theme and in year 2020, the theme is customs fostering sustainability for people, prosperity and planning.

170. **Mr. Paul Akiwumi, Director for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** highlighted that the economic dominance of the commodities sectors in the LLDCs had meant that their growth, and wider development prospects were largely determined by commodity prices and their poor trade performance was largely due to commodity-price trends. He indicated that UNCTAD had carried out extensive research which found out that the commodity-driven development model has several disadvantages including that the benefits of growth tend to be highly concentrated, commodity-driven growth tends to be volatile and that commodity dependence makes industrialization harder to achieve. He emphasized that if LLDCs were to achieve the goals of the VPoA, they needed to support structural transformation, and diversify their economies away from commodity dependence. He informed that UNCTAD planned to launch a new Productive Capacities Index which could be a useful tool to guide the efforts of the LLDCs.

171. Mr. Akiwumi indicated that UNCTAD had identified a number of sectors and products where LLDCs hold substantial potential for export diversification. He noted that recent UNCTAD study of several Asian LLDCs found that all of them have potential in at least two of the following four sectors, such as agro-processing, light manufacturing, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and tourism. In identifying these sectors, he indicated that they looked at both the supply and demand sides of the economy and also studied the potential export markets for specific products. He emphasized that harnessing diversification opportunities required a series of policies and concerted actions from national governments and the international community and these ranged from sector-specific support, to broader economy-wide policies, for example, the sector-specific level policies could include targeted tax incentives, or improved access to finance. In the case of the tourism sector, he indicated that the interventions needed may include increased foreign marketing, improvements in the quality of services delivered, and the lifting of certain visa restrictions.

172. With regard to transport and trade facilitation he highlighted that there was need to improve the hard and soft infrastructure for trade and transport in the LLDCs and this included efforts to support trade facilitation. He highlighted that the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement can make an important difference but also emphasized the need to improve domestic

transport infrastructure, and to ensure that it was aligned with the needs of targeted sectors, not just the extractive or primary commodities sectors. He stressed the need to ensure that a greater proportion of Aid for Trade Funds are allocated to the LLDCs. He noted that at the time, only about 16% of Aid for Trade funds were allocated to the LLDCs.

173. Mr. Akiwumi also indicated that UNCTAD had found that energy policy was essential for supporting structural transformation, and economic diversification and therefore energy policies must go beyond increasing household access but should be channeled to the productive sectors – including agriculture, manufacturing and ICTs. He highlighted that more reliable and affordable energy for productive uses can allow firms to adopt more efficient technologies, raise productivity and facilitate the introduction of new economic activities. He noted that in many LLDCs, the private sector still faces too many obstacles to be able to play its role effectively and these obstacles range from excessive administrative and regulatory requirements to gain access to finance. Hence, private sector facilitation should play a key role. He concluded his intervention by emphasizing the importance of education. He indicated that UNCTAD have found out that there was often an important gap between the skills provided by the national education systems in LLDCs, and those required by the private sector, especially in sectors with potential for high-productivity growth and he therefore emphasized the importance of greater private sector involvement in curriculum-development. He also emphasized the need to strengthen training for entrepreneurship.

Interactive discussions

174. In the interactive discussion Member States acknowledged the importance of trade and structural transformation to achieve sustainable development by LLDCs and in leaving no one behind. The need to strengthen the role of local governments to fostering economic development was highlighted. They also raised several questions on facilitating integration of LLDCs in global trade and how trade can benefit the LLDCs' population living in poverty. Opportunities brought by e-commerce were also acknowledged however it was also recognized that most countries left behind in participating in e-commerce were LLDCs and LDCs. It was therefore emphasized that the special differential treatment was fundamental to ensure that these countries are not left behind.

175. A concern was raised that imported goods were less expensive than those produced nationally and this threatened efforts to achieve structural transformation. It was pointed out that national trade policy plays a key role to address this challenge and Member States were also advised that WTO provided support to build the capacity of developing countries to deal with dumping and anti-competitive practices.

176. The role of the private sector in accelerating economic transformation of LLDCs was emphasized and it was noted that it was important to find ways to engage the private sector. It was noted that most government policies were focused on multinational and micro size private sector and overlooked the capability of SMEs and the national firms to produce jobs and absorb technology. The role of the governments to create the conducive environment for the private sector to flourish was noted to be fundamental. In view of the high cost associated with doing business in LLDCs, regional integration was emphasized as part of the solution to strengthening the LLDCs private sector. The role of UN was noted in this regard. Providing technical assistance to small enterprises and project developers to help them to access finance was stressed.

177. The need for capacity building to facilitate the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement was emphasized. It was highlighted that it was important for development partners to help LLDCs take advantage of provisions that lower trade costs in the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the assistance should also be targeted towards their transit neighbors. The need to ensure appropriate risk management by balancing facilitation and protection of the communities when implementing trade facilitation was also emphasized.

178. On drawing greater finance towards energy transmission, it was noted that there was convergence of opportunities that climate change financing can link to different investment financing for LLDCs in building renewable energy infrastructure. It was noted that national regulatory framework such as monopoly can be an impediment to accessing finance, but it was acknowledged that this was rapidly changing especially in Africa and significant investments were occurring.

VIII. Interactive Panel on regional integration and infrastructure connectivity

179. The High-level Review then held an interactive panel on “Regional integration and infrastructure connectivity”. The Panel was moderated by **Mr. Ashish Shah, Director for Country Programmes at the International Trade Centre** and featured presentations by Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations; Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Ms. Bience Gawanas, Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General; Mr. Umberto de Pretto, Secretary General of the International Road Transport Union; and Mr. Ricardo J. Sánchez, Senior Economic Affairs Officer at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

180. Mr. Shah outlined some of the challenges facing LLDCs, including long distances from ocean ports, high transport costs, reduced trade volume, low internet access, decreasing value addition in agriculture and manufacturing, high concentration of LLDC exports in primary commodities and a share in the global merchandise trade under 1%. He mentioned that positive developments have been seen for example in the entry into force of the AfCFTA or reduction in trade costs for some transport corridors. At the same time, he added that the cost of trade for LLDCs is 45% higher than OECD countries and 100% higher than EU countries. To demonstrate how these factors impact competitiveness, he highlighted that for every \$1 of cost in an OECD country, a LLDCs incurs \$1.45. He explained that the Vienna Programme of Action calls for solutions to the LLDC challenges, adding that regional integration and connectivity remain a priority for economic growth. He noted that the digital revolution has opened new avenues of growth, particularly when one in three people in the world are involved in online shopping, representing an enormous opportunity for LLDCs to be active in e-commerce.

181. **Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations** agreed that costs are much higher for LLDCs, including for trade, moving goods and services, along with related logistical expenses. As a result, it is much harder for LLDCs to be competitive, but Ms. Rugwabiza stressed that with deliberate policies and focused actions, it is possible for LLDCs to address their challenges. Turning to the East Africa region, she said that Rwanda ranks

first in the region in the World Bank's Doing Business rankings as a result of deliberate actions such as for example working to ensure competitive access for businesses to energy and electricity. She added that Rwanda has also invested in logistics platforms and dry ports to allow companies to be able to process goods from Rwanda and to build links with different ports in the region. She stressed that harmonization of frameworks can reduce dramatically the cost of doing business and ensuring that trade facilitation functions in a practical way. She mentioned specifically the one stop border post between Rwanda and DR Congo which has dramatically changed the situation for traders in both countries. On digital connectivity, she again highlighted the importance of harmonizing national frameworks and systems for digital connectedness amongst countries, noting for example how prices have come down drastically for phone calls within the region as a result of harmonization and removal of roaming charges within the region. She mentioned the Smart Africa initiative which has brought together more than 20 countries. She also noted that the AfCFTA is a major game-changer for African countries, and more importantly the LLDCs. She concluded by saying that the Vienna programme of Action should be a platform for building and strengthening partnerships to accelerate progress on the ground.

182. **Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs** highlighted some commonalities among developing countries in special situations, such as dependence on trade for development, relatively small populations and domestic markets. He noted that challenges persist in both soft and hard infrastructure, adding the particular challenge of LLDCs in relying on infrastructure and relations with transit countries in reaching seaports. On soft infrastructure, he stressed that multimodal transit corridors provide reliable framework for LLDCs for transportation within regions and to global markets, however noted the importance of effective transit agreements in bringing together and harmonizing the rules and regulations of neighbouring countries.

183. In terms of hard infrastructure, he noted the challenge of facilitating infrastructure investments that cut across different jurisdictions in multiple countries. He added that financial investments that are regional in nature are more complex and noted the specific role of regional development banks in facilitating investment, in particular by setting up financing arrangements that encourage private sector participation and facilitating development of bankable projects. He discussed also the need for LLDCs to develop climate-resilient and sustainable infrastructure, noting that climate resilience raises the cost of infrastructure investments. He mentioned the great potential of the AfCFTA, but noting that it also puts a further urgency into the need for LLDCs in Africa to reach regional agreements with neighbours on transport and infrastructure development. Furthermore, he emphasized the role of digital connectivity, which does not require the manufacturing process or physical transport. Therefore, enhancing digital connectivity would allow LLDCs to be involved in value-added activities that are not hindered by their landlockedness.

184. **Ms. Bience Gawanas, Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General** highlighted that regional integration is a key topic of importance to African countries, in particular LLDCs, in addressing poverty, inequality and inclusion. She gave the example of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan of Africa, based on the principle of regional integration, with the objective to improve public health and contribute to industrialization and diversification on Africa's economies. She highlighted the AfCFTA as a game changer for African countries,

including LLDCs, and a major milestone in strengthening regional integration. She explained that the AfCFTA can for example help the implementation of the pharmaceutical manufacturing plan for Africa and can also an instrument in facilitating LLDCs' integration into regional and global value chains and production networks. At the same time, she stressed the need to ensure that the opportunities of the AFCFTA will lead to Africa being truly open for business, which is particularly important for LLDCs.

185. Ms. Gawanas stressed the importance of promoting infrastructure development, as a key component of SDG 9, VPoA and various projects of the AU Agenda 2063, to strengthen regional integration. She spoke about the urgent need for scaling up of international support for infrastructure development in LLDCs. She noted that African LLDCs should be given due attention in formulation and implementation of cross-border infrastructure projects. She highlighted some successful projects that could be replicated such as the Lusaka-Chirundu Highway in Zambia and the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway line. She called for further progress towards completing the Trans African Highway (TAH) and its various corridors. She noted that regional organizations, international financial institutions and development partners have an important role to play in supporting LLDCs formulate bankable projects and mobilize sufficient funding for their implementation. She called on LLDCs to fully harness all sources of finance, domestic and international, public and private, to close the infrastructure investment gap.

186. **Mr. Umberto de Pretto, Secretary General of the International Road Transport Union** informed that for road transport, up to 60% of the transport time is spent by being stuck at the border and that up to 40% of transport costs is related to illicit payments (bribes) given that the environment at borders is conducive to corrupt activities. From a business perspective, he noted that investments in transport infrastructure may be futile if goods are stuck at borders and not getting to the market. He added that trucks are also obliged to idle at borders so as to not lose their spot, resulting in increased fuel costs and emissions. He highlighted that intra-regional trade is relatively low due to barriers at the borders, noting that trade not regional, but global. He cited the example of making a vehicle, which requires 10,000 suppliers from all over the world or a cup of coffee in Geneva, which requires 29 companies from 18 countries.

187. He mentioned that harmonized trade practices are required to get goods to market, pointing to the usefulness of the TIR Convention which has been facilitating and securing trade for 70 years. He called it a low-hanging fruit and urged countries that have not yet done so to join the TIR Convention. He informed that 100 billion Euros in guarantees is issued by IRU per year. He explained that since this agreement has been in use, there has not been one major security breach. He noted that there are 76 contracting parties but pointing out that only 11 of 32 LLDCs countries are part of the system. He noted the need for political will. He cited an African Union study finding that trade would double if all African countries were to put the TIR system in place.

188. **Mr. Ricardo J. Sánchez, Senior Economic Affairs Officer at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)** shared some highlights from a recent ECLAC report on Bolivia and Paraguay, noting that they are performing far above the Latin American average in terms of infrastructure development. He explained that average investment in economic infrastructure in the region is 2.2% of GDP, compared with 11% in Bolivia and 5-7% in Paraguay. He added however that this is still not sufficient, and the two LLDCs are still lagging behind in

global terms. He explained that Paraguay has performed well in terms of transport infrastructure investment, including inland road improvements and railway restorations, but it faces bottlenecks in terms of its road network, only 9% of which are paved, and improvements are also required to internal waterways and signalling, improving PPPs and improving airports. Meanwhile, Bolivia has built tunnels and roads, including two-way roads, and works tirelessly to improve access to navigation systems, with its private sector investing significantly in these efforts.

189. Despite the good progress however, Mr. Sánchez highlighted that for both countries, more efficiency gains are needed. He mentioned two initiatives under way that are crucial for the LLDCs. Firstly, the connection from Paraguay to east Brazil through the construction of a Murtinho bridge which will allow East-West connection from Brazil through Paraguay to the Pacific. He noted that similar progress is made in connecting Paraguay, Bolivia to allow connection with maritime ports in Peru and a North-South connection linking Bolivia and Argentina. Secondly, he noted that rivers and waterways provide the primary routes through Paraguay and Bolivia, carrying over 70% of exports and imports, adding that investments in this area are critical to regional integration. He highlighted the need to lower regulatory barrier hindering infrastructure investment between countries and to promote common regional policies, which can address amongst other things also resilience and sustainability.

190. In the **interactive dialogue**, participants elaborated on their own country's experiences, including from several landlocked developed countries. It was noted that Switzerland, while developed country today, could have been classified as a landlocked developing country in the early nineteenth century. It was mentioned how the 1815 outbreak of the Tambora volcano in Indonesia, which led to the "year without a summer" in Europe and famine, has led to a rethinking of agricultural patterns in Switzerland, how to cope with climate disasters and since then Switzerland began its journey to a highly industrialized nation and established itself as a transit country par excellence. The need for political will was highlighted. It was highlighted that in the fight against climate change countries must find a balance between tradition and innovation, adding that new technologies and patterns must be compatible with nature.

191. Participants talked about the opportunities and challenges posed by new technologies, highlighting the challenge faced by LLDCs of high cost of connecting to undersea cables for Internet. At the same time, some panellists noted that most of the cables that are supporting Internet connectivity in East Africa at least are underwater. It was noted that it is important to realize that connectivity is changing very fast and will constitute the key driver of competitiveness and development, especially for LLDCs. It was noted that regulations in place and reasonable access to Internet are some of the prerequisites for private sector's willingness to provide the required financing needed for physical infrastructure, which the Government itself cannot afford. It was noted that financing is available, but the challenge is encouraging the resources to be directed where they are needed. The importance of harmonizing investment frameworks and policies was stressed, noting that global instruments can be used towards this goal.

192. The geographical application of the TIR Convention was discussed, noting that China, Pakistan and India have recently joined the Convention and the Gulf States, except Yemen, will very soon apply the system. In terms of the modal coverage of the Convention (whether it covers also rail transport), it was explained that the system included containerized movements, as long as

there is a road movement at the beginning or end. The digitalization of the TIR was also mentioned. The need for political will to harmonize customs, trade and transport practices, through the application of more than 56 instruments that already exist for this purpose, was highlighted. It was mentioned that inconsistency in regulations between countries may lead to missed opportunities, despite efforts by individual countries towards improving procedures or enhancing investment.

193. The need for Africa to increase its intra-regional trade and its trading power as a continent was highlighted. The need for full implementation of the AfCFTA was clearly stressed. It was noted that the agreement contains various protocols, including on the free movement of services. It was noted that what makes the AfCFTA different is the involvement of the African private sector. It was suggested that Africa should fully take advantage of its countries being resource rich and of strategic partnerships for Africa's development. The need to stop illicit financial flows was highlighted. It was noted that Turkmenistan will host the Ministerial Transport Conference for LLDCs in March 2020.

IX. Summary of Side Events

194. Seven side events were organized by United Nations agencies, Member States, intergovernmental and international organizations and private sector, focusing on the priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action. The side events were attended by senior government officials, including ministers, representatives of United Nations agencies, other regional and international organizations, the private sector and experts.

195. The side events highlighted the importance of integrating the SDGs and VPoA in national development strategies and plans and ensuring coherence. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) were noted as useful process to accelerate the implementation of 2030 Agenda and VPoA. A call was made to better reflect LLDC issues in the High-Level Political Forum.

196. Emphasis was laid on enhancing transit transport systems and promoting trade facilitation as key priorities for the LLDCs for expansion of their trade, increasing connectivity and greater integration into regional and global trading networks. It was observed that administrative barriers in cross border movements of goods remains one of the biggest obstacles towards seamless movement of goods in global supply chains and integrating LLDCs into the world economy. The importance of not only ratifying, but also effectively implementing the provisions of international agreements such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the TIR Convention were emphasized. Best practices in the area of transit and trade facilitation were highlighted, such as regional electronic cargo tracking systems, e-TIR, interconnectivity of customs IT systems and promotion of the corridor approach. Considering the use of a single multimodal fully digital transit document based on the modern (blockchain) technologies was also mentioned.

197. The full operationalization of AfCFTA was stressed which would contribute to balanced and mutually beneficial regional integration that will support the implementation of SDG in LLDCs. The need for greater regional collaborations, closer cooperation and enhanced experience sharing between LLDCs and transit countries, was highlighted.

198. It was recognized that ICTs could help LLDCs leapfrog in many areas, including through enhanced efficiency and access to regional and global value chains as well as integration into e-commerce. At the same time, infrastructure gaps, high cost of ICT services, and high cost of accessing submarine cables were highlighted as preventing LLDCs to fully harnessing the development potential of ICT. The need to enhance support to LLDCs to address the digital divide and ensure that they were integrated into the digital economy as well as e-commerce was therefore emphasized. Developing countries and LLDCs were encouraged to join the e-commerce negotiations in the WTO, with a view to contribute to the shaping of the future multilateral regulations on digital trade.

199. The need to build the capacity of the MSMEs and the indigenous private sector, including building their capacity to participate in international trade as well enhancing access to trade finance was stressed. It was noted that the LLDCs were making efforts to diversify their economies and add value to their products, but that without meaningful structural transformation, they will be unable to make real progress towards VPoA and may risk missing the SDG targets. Recommendations were made to harness the LLDCs potential and bring about structural transformation. It was recognized that there were opportunities that could be exploited, including adding value to LLDCs' commodities and developing downstream industries.

200. There was a common understanding that the financing needs of LLDCs far exceed the levels of development finance available from traditional sources. Greater attraction of FDI, strengthening of regulatory framework for PPPs, leveraging innovative financing mechanisms and emergence of impact investing were all discussed as avenues to help fill part of this financial gap. Furthermore, deliberate efforts that are needed to enhance the role of the private sector were stressed. Calls were made for greater capacity building support for LLDCs, in areas such as implementation of the provisions of international agreements, transit and trade facilitation, statistical capacity building to monitor progress on SDGs and VPoA.

X. Closing

201. **Closing Address by H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the General Assembly.** H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande expressed his appreciation for everyone's participation in the deliberations and extended his gratitude to LLDCs for sharing their experiences. He welcomed the solidarity demonstrated by delegations from transit countries, developed states, as well as stakeholders from Observer delegations, the United Nations system, and members of civil society. He indicated that the Political Declaration adopted on 5 December 2019 set the foundation for discussions which enhanced the understanding of both the challenges of, and opportunities for, LLDCs.

202. H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande stressed that we must ensure continued dialogue into 2020 and beyond, to live up to our promise to leave no one behind. He further emphasized the need to seize the momentum further generated around the Midterm Review to redouble efforts to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. He indicated that by doing so we will at the same time work towards meeting the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He explained that this is critical as we enter the Decade of Action and Delivery. The President of the General Assembly noted that LLDCs should be supported in the fulfillment of the objectives

set out in the Vienna Programme for Action. He called on Member States to support LLDCs and this involves collaborating with all partners including the private sector and civil society.

203. H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande expressed his appreciation to participants for their commitment to a better future for all. He particularly thanked the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and her team for the excellent work they had done. He extended his gratitude to the Secretariat, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), the interpreters, technicians, conference services staff and security officers for their outstanding support to our work. He concluded by calling on the member states to take action to ensure a better world for the people in the LLDCs. He also requested to take every measure to implement the Vienna Programme of Action and assured the member states that they have a partner in this endeavor throughout the seventy-fourth session.

204. **Closing Address by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative and Under-Secretary-General.** Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu expressed appreciation to the President of the General Assembly, for his strong leadership in this High-level Mid-term Review. She also extended her deep appreciation to the Permanent Representatives of Bhutan and Austria, Ambassador Doma Tshering and Ambassador Jan Kickert for leading the intergovernmental consultations that resulted in the political declaration adopted yesterday. She conveyed her appreciation to the member states and all stakeholders for their outstanding contribution to the success of the Mid Term Review. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu highlighted that in addition to the intergovernmental plenary, the mid-term review featured three high-level panels on priority issues to the LLDCs and seven side events. She stressed that they provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to discuss lessons learnt and propose options to intensify action to accelerate progress in the implementation of the VPoA. She explained that concrete suggestions were made at the side events in the areas of ICTs and ecommerce; enhancing transit, transport logistics and trade facilitation; modernization of the transit process; deepening of regional integration; the important role of the private sector; supporting the LLDCs to monitor VPoA and the SDGs; and impact investing and innovative resource mobilization.

205. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu explained that major upcoming conferences next year that are of great significance to LLDCs were highlighted – the second Global Sustainable Transport Conference, the 12th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference; the 15th UNCTAD Quadrennial Conference, and the 2020 UN Ocean Conference. She noted that these conferences should further consider and promote partnerships and initiatives in support of LLDCs. She indicated that during these two days, the member states capitalized on the unprecedented global consensus and momentum for the concerns and needs of LLDCs. She stressed that the Political Declaration that the member states adopted symbolizes the renewed commitment of the international community to support the aspirations of the LLDCs on their path towards sustainable development. She highlighted that it is reflective of the solidarity, spirit of cooperation, and collaboration among all stakeholders.

206. Ms. ‘Utoikamanu shared six key messages from the Review and the Political Declaration. First that the member states must acknowledge their achievements made on the VPoA priorities in the last five years. She explained that there were success stories and lessons learnt and it is

important to build on these achievements. Secondly that the member states identified the constraints and implementation gaps. She indicated that one third of the LLDCs' population still lives in extreme poverty and food insecurity persists. She continued that infrastructure connectivity is incomplete and there are challenges in effective implementation of trade and transport conventions and agreements. She also noted that structural economic transformation is limited and reliable, timely and comparable data are lacking. She continued that capacity constraints persist. She explained that the impact of climate change, desertification, deforestation, land degradation, biodiversity loss, drought, receding glaciers are increasingly felt. She emphasized that much more needs to be done through measures to improve trade and transit transport, building of climate and disaster-resilient transport infrastructure, diversifying and adding value to production and export structures, creating enabling environments for private sector development as well as increasing the impact of foreign investment and promoting domestic capital markets.

207. Ms. 'Utoikamanu noted that the third message is that substantial financing and capacity development are required to support the priorities of the LLDCs in particular transport, energy and ICT infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, industrialization and regional integration. She explained that greater mobilization of resources is needed from both domestic and international, public and private, to meet the development needs of LLDCs. She indicated that the fourth message is the need for enhanced genuine, effective and durable multi-stakeholder partnerships which are key to accelerating implementation of the VPoA in order to turn the LLDCs into vibrant, prosperous and sustainable land-linked countries. She noted that this needs to include governments, the UN system, multilateral development institutions, regional and sub-regional organizations, the private sector, think tanks, and civil society at all levels – national, sub-regional, regional and international.

208. Ms. 'Utoikamanu indicated the fifth message to be greater coherence in the implementation of the Vienna Programme and the 2030 Agenda and other global development frameworks including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement on climate change is crucial. She noted the sixth message which is the implementation, monitoring and follow up, at all levels, of the provisions of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Political Declaration of the mid-term review are essential. She called on all parties to let the political declaration and its call for action to guide targeted and accelerated measures to fully achieve the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining five years.

209. Ms. 'Utoikamanu expressed her appreciation to the leadership role provided by Paraguay as Chair of the LLDCs. She thanked deeply for his commitment and strong support and expressed that she looked forward to working with the incoming Chair Kazakhstan in implementing the outcome of the meeting. She also extended her gratitude to the Governments of Austria, the People's Republic of China, India and the Russian Federation for their contributions towards supporting the preparatory process of the Midterm Review and the participation of delegates from capitals. She continued and thanked all staff, including OHRLLS staff as well as colleagues from other UN departments and entities for working together to make the meeting a success.

210. Ms. 'Utoikamanu concluded by reiterating that LLDCs represent about 509 million people. She stressed that it is important to pool all efforts and enhance partnerships for LLDCs to ensure that they are not left behind. She assured everyone that her Office places great importance in their

continued support to the sustainable development of LLDCs. She stressed that her office will continue, together with Partners, to mobilize support to this end.

Annex 1:

Political Declaration of the High-level Midterm Review on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 - A/RES/74/15

The General Assembly

Adopts the following political declaration:

Political Declaration of the High-level Midterm Review on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024

Preamble

1. We, Heads of State and Government, Ministers and High Representatives, gathered at the United Nations on 5 and 6 December 2019 to review the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024,² reaffirm our commitment to the overarching goal of the Vienna Programme of Action to address the special development needs and challenges of landlocked developing countries arising from landlockedness, remoteness and geographical constraints in a more coherent manner and we collectively commit to strengthened cooperation in the context of sustainable development for landlocked developing countries.

2. We reaffirm our commitment to the full, effective and timely implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³ and which is in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,⁴ the Paris Agreement⁵ and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030,⁶ as well as with other international frameworks, such as the New Urban Agenda.⁷ Effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda are mutually reinforcing and crucial for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. We emphasize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

4. We are committed in our endeavour to help to turn landlocked developing countries into land-linked countries; for this we must come together in durable, transparent, accountable and effective partnerships between landlocked developing countries and transit countries and their development partners, as well as with a range of stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, academia and youth. We further reaffirm that gender equality and the

² Resolution [69/137](#), annex II.

³ Resolution [70/1](#).

⁴ Resolution [69/313](#), annex.

⁵ See [FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1](#), decision 1/CP.21, annex.

⁶ Resolution [69/283](#), annex II.

⁷ Resolution [71/256](#), annex.

empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to the achievement of the Vienna Programme of Action.

5. We recognize the importance of unfettered, efficient and cost-effective access for landlocked developing countries to and from the sea, on the basis of freedom of transit and other related matters, in accordance with the applicable rules of international law.

Review and assessment of progress, gaps and challenges

6. We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action⁸ and recognize the many efforts at all levels made by landlocked developing countries and transit countries, with the support of development partners, and the progress achieved since 2014, building on the Almaty Programme of Action.⁹ At the same time, we remain concerned that the progress made is not enough for landlocked developing countries to achieve the Vienna Programme of Action targets and sustainable development. We note with concern that one third of the population of landlocked developing countries is still living in extreme poverty, the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity persists, the average human development index of landlocked developing countries lags behind the world average and economic growth of landlocked developing countries has declined during the review period.

7. We commend those landlocked developing countries that have met the criteria for graduation from least developed country status.

8. We recognize that a key challenge faced by landlocked developing countries is the lack of reliable and regular data to inform policy and ensure follow-up, including on some of the specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action.

9. We recognize the progress that has been made by landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries in ratifying the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the revised Kyoto Convention,¹⁰ the TIR Convention¹¹ and other relevant international conventions. We note, however, that there is a need for landlocked developing countries and transit countries to effectively implement their obligations under these conventions and agreements.

10. We welcome the recent developments among landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours in building transit transport and economic corridors. Progress has been made in reducing travel time and corresponding costs along corridors, significantly reducing the time spent at borders and at intermodal points.

⁸ [A/74/113](#).

⁹ Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries (*Report of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 28 and 29 August 2003* ([A/CONF.202/3](#)), annex I).

¹⁰ Protocol of Amendment to the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2370, No. 13561).

¹¹ Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1079, No. 16510).

11. Progress has been made in landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries towards the expansion and upgrading of railways, roads, ports, air transport and inland waterways. Some missing links have been closed, and regional integration has been strengthened, but limited connectivity of landlocked developing countries remains one of the main obstacles to their enhanced trade integration.

12. We note that infrastructure in landlocked developing countries for the production, supply, transmission and distribution of modern and renewable energy services has been expanded and upgraded. However, more than 40 per cent of the population of landlocked developing countries still does not have access to electricity, and the rural-urban gap remains significant. The pace of completion of power projects is too slow.

13. We recognize that access to information and communications technologies in landlocked developing countries has increased. However, we note that landlocked developing countries continue to face major constraints that include infrastructural gaps and the relatively high cost of information and communications technology services, in particular accessing submarine cables.

14. The major challenges in infrastructure development include limited financial resources to close the significant infrastructure financing gaps, lack of capacity to develop bankable infrastructure projects, limited technologies and lack of resilient infrastructure.

15. We welcome efforts made by landlocked developing countries to enhance their participation in global trade, including through mainstreaming trade into their national strategies and updating their trade-related policies. However, we note that landlocked developing countries continue to face greater difficulties than coastal countries in expanding international trade. The competitiveness of landlocked developing countries remains limited owing to the high cost of trade, which is double that of transit developing countries. In that regard, we note with concern that the share of landlocked developing countries in global trade has declined and their share of global merchandise exports has decreased, while the total value of merchandise imports has increased.

16. We are concerned that most of the exports of landlocked developing countries remain highly concentrated on a few primary commodities and that service exports are still dominated by the tourism sector. The lack of diversification of exports of landlocked developing countries exacerbates their vulnerability to excessive price volatility and exogenous economic and environmental shocks.

17. We note the lack of availability of trade finance in landlocked developing countries. We reaffirm that international trade is an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction and contributes to the promotion of sustainable development.

18. We note with concern the lack of access to capital for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, including women- and youth-owned enterprises, which affects overall private sector development and economic growth in landlocked developing countries. We are further concerned that landlocked developing countries still fall behind in their electronic commerce (e-commerce) readiness.

19. We recognize that the participation of landlocked developing countries in regional and subregional trade, transport and transit facilitation agreements and initiatives aimed at deepening regional integration, enhancing infrastructure

connectivity and facilitating the movement of cargo across borders has increased. Landlocked developing countries have entered into bilateral and plurilateral trade, transport and transit-related agreements with their neighbours. In this regard, we take note of the entry into force of the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

20. We are encouraged by signs that broader cooperation in areas such as investment, research and development and policies supportive of regional industrial development and regional connectivity is taking place both among landlocked developing countries and between landlocked developing countries and their neighbours.

21. Since 2014, many landlocked developing countries have placed structural economic transformation at the centre of their national development plans and adopted strategies for diversification and upgrading of their economies, industrialization, export promotion and private sector development, but landlocked developing countries have made limited advancement towards achieving structural transformation, still have limited manufacturing and industrial capacity to create high value added products, some landlocked developing countries even showing signs of de-industrialization of their economies.

22. We acknowledge the efforts by landlocked developing countries to support private sector development and emphasize that an enabling legal and regulatory environment for the local private sector is one of the most important requirements for promoting sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, developing an industrial base, attracting investment and bringing about structural transformation.

23. We express concern at the limited technological capabilities, low technology intensity and acquisition and low investments in research and development in landlocked developing countries.

24. Landlocked developing countries are highly vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change and remain heavily affected by desertification, land degradation, biodiversity loss, drought and receding glaciers. We are concerned about the economic, social and environmental impacts of sudden- and slow-onset disasters in landlocked developing countries, as well as the impacts of disasters in transit countries on the economies of landlocked developing countries.

25. We note that lack of adequate financial resources and capacity constraints are some of the biggest challenges that landlocked developing countries face in their efforts to implement the Vienna Programme of Action and achieve sustained growth and sustainable development.

26. We recognize that landlocked developing countries and their transit country neighbours need to effectively mobilize adequate domestic and external resources, both public and private, for the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. We acknowledge the importance of cohesive, nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks. We note that the average tax revenue in landlocked developing countries is not sufficient to meet development needs. We express concern that illicit financial flows have an adverse impact on domestic resource mobilization and on the sustainability of public finances in landlocked developing countries.

27. We commend the greater international attention that has been given to landlocked developing countries since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action, including increased official development assistance and aid for trade and South-South and triangular cooperation. We reaffirm the need for renewed and strengthened partnerships for the landlocked developing countries' development. We welcome that official development assistance flows to landlocked developing countries have increased in real terms. At the same time, we note that much of the official development assistance continues to be concentrated in a few landlocked developing countries. We also express concern over the continued decline in foreign direct investment flows to landlocked developing countries, which is an impediment to their economic growth.

Call for action to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action

28. Having noted the progress made and challenges encountered by landlocked developing countries in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call for action in the following key areas.

29. We underscore the need to capture data to monitor the specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action and commit to providing landlocked developing countries with capacity-building support to strengthen their national statistical systems.

30. We commit to targeted and accelerated action to remove all legal, social and economic barriers to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the realization and enjoyment of their human rights.

31. We underscore the importance of mobilizing adequate resources to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and to support the landlocked developing countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets by 2030.

32. We call upon landlocked developing countries and transit countries to effectively implement their obligations under all relevant international, regional and bilateral agreements to improve transit in a manner consistent with their trade and development objectives.

33. Landlocked developing countries and transit countries should consider promoting a corridor approach to improve trade and transit transport. We call upon landlocked developing countries and transit countries to make additional efforts to reduce travel time along the corridors and to adopt an integrated and sustainable approach to the management of international transport corridors in order to avoid the duplication of efforts, to promote regional connectivity and to maximize the associated economic opportunities.

34. We call upon the United Nations system and other relevant international and regional organizations to provide, within their mandates, policy, analytical and technical support towards the development, functioning and management of corridors.

35. We encourage landlocked developing countries and transit countries to integrate the development, upgrading and maintenance of national and transboundary transport infrastructure into their national development strategies.

36. We call upon landlocked developing countries and transit countries, with the support of their development and trade partners, to develop regionally integrated, sustainable, climate- and disaster-resilient transport infrastructure and to close missing links in order to reduce the cost of doing business and increase intraregional trade.
37. We encourage landlocked developing countries and transit countries to create an enabling environment for public and private sustainable investment and infrastructure operations.
38. We encourage landlocked developing countries and transit countries to expand and upgrade supply, transmission and distribution infrastructure for electricity, including off-grid solutions, to accelerate the preparation of power projects, especially renewables, while acknowledging the role of all energy sources and technologies in the energy mix, to scale up projects on cross-border interconnectors and to improve transformational energy access and ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
39. We invite landlocked developing countries and transit countries to collaborate to establish information and communications technology infrastructure, applications and services with the support of Governments, the private sector, development partners, multilateral financial and development institutions and regional banks. The substantial digital divides between landlocked developing countries and the developed countries need to be addressed.
40. We call upon development partners, the United Nations system, international financial institutions and international and regional organizations to provide technical support to landlocked developing countries for the formulation and implementation of bankable infrastructure and transport development projects.
41. We encourage landlocked developing countries to continue to formulate policies and strategies aimed at diversifying their export structure and adding value to their exports in order to expand their participation in sustainable regional and global value chains.
42. We encourage landlocked developing countries, with the support of their development and trade partners, to reduce “before the border” trade costs by improving transport networks and customs procedures, as well as by the application of technology-driven and information and communications technology solutions to expedite international trade.
43. We reaffirm the importance of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation in addressing high trade and transit costs and call for full and timely implementation of the Agreement by all the members of the World Trade Organization. Landlocked developing countries should promptly notify their technical assistance needs. We also invite development partners and relevant organizations to enhance support to landlocked developing countries to implement their World Trade Organization commitments.
44. We call upon all Member States to enhance market access for exports from landlocked developing countries, except for arms and armaments. We also call upon development partners to support efforts by landlocked developing countries to diversify their exports, including through supporting their national export strategies and trade policies.

45. We call upon development partners and multilateral development banks to support landlocked developing countries in strengthening trade financing for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and promoting trade finance facilitation programmes.

46. We underscore the potential for landlocked developing countries to facilitate their integration into regional and global value chains and to expand their trade capabilities and connectivity by strengthening productive linkages, supporting the development of supply chains within the region and improving the quality and the effective implementation of regional integration agreements.

47. We call upon the United Nations system, regional and international development partners and other international organizations to support landlocked developing countries and transit countries in leveraging the opportunities provided by regional initiatives and integration.

48. We encourage landlocked developing countries to promote innovative solutions in sectors such as agriculture, transport, information and communications, finance, energy, health, water and sanitation and education, and effective public-private partnerships through investments in education and skills development, including technical, vocational and tertiary education and training, while ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels. We recognize that these investments are required to reduce economic volatility, enable landlocked developing countries to reap the demographic dividend, and achieve lifelong learning and broader human development.

49. We call upon landlocked developing countries to encourage private sector development by enhancing private sector capabilities, as well as improving economic governance and business regulations.

50. We are determined to build economies and societies in landlocked developing countries that are resilient to external economic shocks, disasters and the adverse impact of climate change and environmental degradation. We urge development partners, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations to support landlocked developing countries' efforts to develop and implement nationally determined contributions and national long-term climate change strategies in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and to develop tools to prevent and combat desertification, land degradation, biodiversity loss, drought and receding glaciers, as well as to strengthen integrated water resources management, disaster risk prevention, preparedness and response, and early warning and early action systems.

51. We encourage development partners to support landlocked developing countries in building institutional and human capacities.

52. We call upon the United Nations system to provide assistance to countries graduating from the least developed country category in the implementation of their national transition strategies and to consider country-specific support for graduated countries for a fixed period of time and in a predictable manner, and call upon development partners to support smooth transition.

53. We encourage landlocked developing countries to strengthen their services sector and enhance their efforts to integrate into e-commerce. In this regard, we encourage international partners to provide capacity-building to assist landlocked developing countries in addressing gaps in legal and regulatory frameworks and developing digital skills.

54. We encourage landlocked developing countries to develop national science, technology and innovation policies and to create enabling science, technology and innovation infrastructure. We invite development partners and international organizations to support efforts by landlocked developing countries to establish or strengthen national and regional centres for science, technology and innovation development.

55. We welcome existing technology and research funds established by development partners and international and regional financial institutions, and encourage similar initiatives to support landlocked developing countries for a greater use and adaptation of technology.

56. We encourage landlocked developing countries to continue to make improvements in the regulatory environment for business, in particular for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. We also urge enhanced international and domestic investments in research and development in landlocked developing countries.

57. We encourage landlocked developing countries to strengthen their efforts in raising domestic resources, including through carrying out reforms in tax administration, broadening the tax base and strengthening domestic capital markets, and call upon the international community to assist these efforts in line with national priorities.

58. We call upon development partners to strengthen support to landlocked developing countries, taking into account all sources. At the same time, we encourage landlocked developing countries to better leverage official development assistance for attracting further finance from other sources, such as foreign direct investment, public-private sector partnerships and other sources of finance.

59. We encourage Member States to facilitate foreign direct investment flows to landlocked developing countries and call upon landlocked and transit developing countries to promote an enabling environment to attract foreign direct investment and private sector involvement.

60. We call upon development partners to continue to provide aid for trade to landlocked developing countries, consistent with World Trade Organization guidelines.

61. We call upon the developing and developed countries to continue to support landlocked developing countries through South-South and triangular cooperation in line with the respective modalities of cooperation.

62. We welcome the establishment of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries and call upon all landlocked developing countries that have not done so to ratify or accede to the multilateral agreement for its establishment. We invite Member States and other relevant stakeholders to consider making voluntary contributions to the Think Tank budget.

63. We call upon the United Nations system, including the regional economic commissions, as well as all relevant international and regional organizations, to continue to provide the support necessary to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

64. We call upon the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to continue to ensure the coordinated follow-up to, effective

monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

65. We call upon the Secretary-General to continue to mobilize the resources necessary to enable the Landlocked Developing Countries Unit of the Office of the High Representative to fulfil its mandate in support of the landlocked developing countries.

Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

66. We invite the General Assembly to consider holding the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries in 2024.

*39th plenary meeting
5 December 2019*

Annex 2: List of Participating Countries and Organizations

1. Afghanistan	35. Cyprus
2. Algeria	36. Czech Republic
3. Andorra	37. Djibouti
4. Argentina	38. Dominica
5. Armenia	39. Dominican Republic
6. Australia	40. Ecuador
7. Austria	41. Egypt
8. Azerbaijan	42. El Salvador
9. Bahamas	43. Eritrea
10. Bahrain	44. Estonia
11. Bangladesh	45. Eswatini
12. Belize	46. Ethiopia
13. Benin	47. Fiji
14. Bhutan	48. Finland
15. Bolivia	49. France
16. Bosnia and Herzegovina	50. Gambia
17. Botswana	51. Georgia
18. Brazil	52. Germany
19. Brunei Darussalam	53. Ghana
20. Burkina Faso	54. Greece
21. Burundi	55. Guatemala
22. Cabo Verde	56. Guinea
23. Cambodia	57. Guinea-Bissau
24. Cameroon	58. Haiti
25. Canada	59. Hungary
26. Central African Republic	60. Iceland
27. Chad	61. India
28. Chile	62. Indonesia
29. China	63. Iran
30. Colombia	64. Iraq
31. Costa Rica	65. Ireland
32. Côte d'Ivoire	66. Israel
33. Croatia	67. Italy
34. Cuba	68. Japan

69. Kazakhstan	105. Panama
70. Kenya	106. Papua New Guinea
71. Kuwait	107. Paraguay
72. Kyrgyzstan	108. Philippines
73. Lao PDR	109. Poland
74. Latvia	110. Portugal
75. Lesotho	111. Qatar
76. Libya	112. Republic of Korea
77. Liechtenstein	113. Republic of Moldova
78. Lithuania	114. Romania
79. Luxembourg	115. Russian Federation
80. Malawi	116. Rwanda
81. Malaysia	117. Saint Lucia
82. Maldives	118. San Marino
83. Mali	119. Saudi Arabia
84. Malta	120. Senegal
85. Mauritania	121. Seychelles
86. Mauritius	122. Serbia
87. Mexico	123. Singapore
88. Micronesia	124. Slovakia
89. Monaco	125. Slovenia
90. Mongolia	126. South Africa
91. Montenegro	127. South Sudan
92. Morocco	128. Sri Lanka
93. Mozambique	129. Sweden
94. Myanmar	130. Tajikistan
95. Namibia	131. Thailand
96. Nepal	132. Togo
97. New Zealand	133. Tunisia
98. Niger	134. Turkey
99. Nigeria	135. Turkmenistan
100. North Macedonia	136. Uganda
101. Norway	137. Ukraine
102. Oman	138. United Arab Emirates
103. Pakistan	139. United Kingdom
104. Palau	140. United States

141. Uruguay	
142. Uzbekistan	
143. Viet Nam	
144. Yemen	
145. Zambia	
146. Zimbabwe	
147. European Union (Observer)	
148. Holy See (Observer)	
149. State of Palestine (Observer)	
Organizations:	
150. African Development Bank (AFDB)	
151. African Union	
152. Common Fund for Commodities (CFC)	
153. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	
154. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	
155. International Road Transport Union (IRU)	
156. International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	
157. Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority	
158. Organization of American States (OAS)	
159. Southern African Development Community (SADC)	
160. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	
161. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)	
162. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	
163. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	
164. United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries	
165. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)	
166. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)	
167. World Trade Organization (WTO)	
168. World Bank	
169. World Customs Organization (WCO)	
170. The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)	