

Ministerial Transport Conference of Landlocked Developing Countries in Turkmenbashi
15-16 August 2022

Theme: Ashgabat Process: Financing for Better Connectivity

Opening Session: Enhancing transport connectivity for sustainable recovery of LLDCs from COVID-19 pandemic

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1. Introduction and greetings

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me to begin by thanking the Government of Turkmenistan – and the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States – for hosting this event on enhanced transport connectivity, post-pandemic recovery and sustainable development.

I am honoured to speak to you today on a very important question – how to lessen the impact of the pandemic and build back better.

IRU is the world road transport organisation. With members and activities in more than 80 countries, we represent 3.5 million transport operators that move people and goods across cities, countries and continents.

As a trusted partner of the United Nations and its regional bodies ever since our creation in 1948, IRU supports and advises on issues related to development, trade and transport.

IRU has long worked with UN-OHRLLS. We fully support the Vienna Programme of Action as an essential tool to guide landlocked developing countries in improving regional integration.

2. Major challenges

The pandemic and geopolitical unrest have had a tremendous impact on trade and transport links. The consequent soaring fuel prices have also hit commercial and passenger transport

operators in all regions. Moreover, the disruption of supply chains and changing logistics flows is putting new corridors in the spotlight.

As commercial transport by air and sea has been limited due to strict confinement measures, land transport has become even more important to keep international supply chains open and running.

The world's 32 landlocked developing countries face even greater challenges due to geographical disadvantage. Their access to global markets depends on transit through neighbouring countries.

Without a coordinated and robust approach to address the ongoing social and economic challenges that confront landlocked developing countries, they risk losing hard-won development gains from recent years.

Taking stock of the pandemic's impact, our joint efforts should be focused on initiatives and instruments to facilitate the flow of goods across borders, including the use of the TIR system and its digital tools.

3. Available solutions

International multilateral instruments, aiming at transit facilitation, are important to keep borders running smoothly and efficiently.

Inefficient customs procedures hamper economic growth in all countries, but especially for landlocked developing countries. Using tried and tested UN instruments, such as the TIR Convention, facilitates trade and transport and ultimately turns landlocked countries into land linked trading nations.

As the only global transit solution, TIR enables goods to be shipped from a country of origin, through transit countries, to a country of destination, via a secure, multilateral, multimodal and mutually recognised system. It simplifies customs procedures and significantly reduces transport times and costs.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. The needed tools exist already.

Most regional transport corridors are multimodal and require multiple transshipments of containers. Improving transport connectivity and interoperability, therefore, are crucial for efficient operations, sustainable growth and strengthening cooperation between the countries.

We cannot achieve sustainable development without robust, multimodal transport corridors and reliable infrastructure.

We appreciate every millimeter of new road infrastructure, but fantastic roads do not make road transport and trade more efficient if they lead to congested border crossings.

Therefore, it is equally important that hard infrastructure is coupled with good soft infrastructure – the processes, rules and services that support efficient transport.

Improvements in these areas, in fact, often offer the biggest and fastest return on investment.

4. Call for action

I strongly encourage all developing countries to ratify existing UN instruments to facilitate and secure trade, such as the TIR Convention. The UN Secretary General has also identified TIR as an important tool to help countries deal with the effects of the pandemic.

Countries that have done so already should coordinate efforts to digitalise transit procedures with TIR, as some countries in your region are doing now.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in partnership with stakeholders from private and public sectors, and with support from international organisations and development partners, have already championed digitalised TIR transports using the benefits of existing TIR tools.

We look forward to see the host of today's conference, Turkmenistan, as well as other interested countries, joining efforts to implement digital TIR and the e-CMR protocol.

Quick implementation of digital TIR and digital consignment notes also reduces physical contact between transport workers and customs officers, boosting the seamless flow of goods across borders along “digital corridors”.

As the foundation for all intermodal supply chains and mobility networks, road transport services underpin all economic activity. Economic recovery from the pandemic and its impacts depends directly on the efficiency of road transport.

IRU stands ready to support initiatives to develop sustainable trade, transport and transit connectivity of land locked developing countries.

5. Close

In closing, I am honoured to have this opportunity to address you today.

I would like to congratulate the people of Turkmenistan and the esteemed President Serdar Berdimuhamedov on their accomplishments to improve infrastructure and new initiatives to ensure transport connectivity, thus supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and as the highly respected hosts for this conference.

Allow me also to thank UNOHRLLS for their vital ongoing efforts in supporting countries around the world, especially landlocked developing countries, and their role in organising this important event.

I wish you many years of prosperity, good health and peace.

Thank you.