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Remarks by

Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox,

**Acting High Representative for
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries and Small Island Developing States**

at

**The Inaugural meeting of the LLDCs National Focal Point
Network**

**Theme: Towards accelerated implementation of the VPoA
and building coherence with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable
development: The role of National Focal Points**

10:00am 16-17 June 2022

Venue: Palais des Nations – Room XXI – Geneva

- H.E. Dr. Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Botswana to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, LLDC Group Global Chair and Coordinator on Trade and Development in Geneva,
- Distinguished National Focal Points
- Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Inaugural Meeting of the National Focal Points of Landlocked Developing Countries.

This is a key milestone, as we aim to further promote the national implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA).

We want the LLDC Network to follow the successful example of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Focal Points in these countries act as the eyes and ears for the internationally agreed goals and ambitions. They help turn ideas into reality.

And that, I know, will be of utmost importance to you, as we consider the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs.

The Vienna Programme of Action represents an international compact for comprehensively addressing the challenges of LLDCs.

It is centred around 6 priority areas of action:

- transit policy issues,
- infrastructure development,
- international trade and trade facilitation,
- regional integration,

- structural economic transformation
- and means of implementation.

The VPoA is integral to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This means that its full and effective implementation is vital to the achievement of the SDGs by LLDCs.

The VPoA is also closely linked to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. This is aimed at facilitating movement of goods in transit, speeding up border procedures and reducing trade and transaction costs.

This is why we encourage the National Focal Points to also be members of the National Trade Facilitation Committees.

For their part, Governments of LLDCs are invited to mainstream the VPoA into their national and sectoral development strategies. This will help facilitate its effective implementation and follow-up.

With only two years remaining for implementing the VPoA, some progress had been made – especially in the following areas:

- Undertaking some trade facilitation reforms.
- Expanding and upgrading transport infrastructure.
- Improvements in energy and ICT connectivity and increase in regional integration and cooperation.

This progress is welcome, but it is not sufficient to achieve our ambitions.

The LLDCs still remain marginalized in global trade and are lagging behind in terms of structural economic transformation.

LLDCs share of global exports remain below 1% and their exports are mainly commodities.

And LLDCs continue to face high trade costs, struggling with inadequate physical, digital and energy connectivity.

As we know, LLDCs are also greatly impacted by environmental factors. Climate change, land degradation, desertification, droughts, melting of glaciers, environmental degradation and disasters – these all hit LLDCs disproportionately.

The challenges were already stark – and the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated many of the challenges facing the LLDCs.

All major macroeconomic indicators were negatively impacted.

Growth in real gross domestic product fell from 4.3% in 2019 to -2.4% in 2020 and grew by only 4.1% on average in 2021, which is insufficient to reverse the increase in poverty due to COVID-19.

Merchandise exports declined by 11% to \$168 billion in 2020 and increased by 28% to \$217 billion in 2021.

FDI contracted by 31% in 2020, the lowest level since 2007.

Migrant remittances fell by 6% in 2020 and tourism came to a virtual standstill.

Border crossing restrictions enacted due to the pandemic had a severe impact on LLDCs' already difficult trading arrangements.

Clearly, immediate and sustainable recovery efforts are needed to restore progress.

At the request of the Chair of LLDCs a Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA was developed and adopted by the LLDCs' Ministerial Meeting in 2020.

The Roadmap contains activities and deliverables being implemented by the United Nations system, and other international and regional organizations. All of this work is being done in collaboration with LLDCs to support their own efforts on this agenda.

We now need a more concerted effort to see the change we need on the ground.

Now is the time for more national commitment and leadership in combination with strong international support.

And we do seek to accelerate this implementation of the VPoA, we must do so in coherence with the internationally agreed global frameworks.

We must keep true to the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement, and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Your role as National Focal Points is therefore vital.

You are the direct link between the global development frameworks –and the national-level implementation.

As designated Focal Points, you will be actively involved in promoting the implementation, monitoring and review of the VPoA and SDGs.

Not just in your respective countries, but also at sub-regional and regional level too.

Most of the activities in the roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA are demand driven.

You are therefore encouraged to review the roadmap and identify opportunities for support.

We will be right by your side in this endeavor. Several UN and international organizations will be sharing with you more details on available support during this meeting.

It is also important for the NFPs to work closely with Resident Coordinators and UN Country teams. It is by working together we can better implement the VPoA, and achieve better outcomes for the people in these countries.

Last year the former Under Secretary General hosted a webinar with the Resident Coordinators – and they were given the same message. We requested they work closely with you to achieve our aims. Together, stronger.

I am glad that some Resident Coordinators or their representatives are part of this meeting. I hope that encourages some dialogue on how to further collaborate.

The UN General Assembly in its resolution adopted last December, decided to hold a Third UN Conference on LLDCs in 2024.

This will enable the international community to renew their global commitments towards the LLDCs. Your contribution in organizing the conference will be fundamental.

This office looks forward to working closely with you on that in the near future.

I look forward to our fruitful deliberations and forward-looking outcomes.

Thank you.

