



**United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States  
(UN-OHRLS)**

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**Report of the Twelfth Inter-Agency Consultative Group Meeting on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs**

**Virtual Meeting (via Microsoft Teams)**

**15 July 2021**

## **Introduction**

The Twelfth Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) Meeting on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) was held virtually on 15 July 2021. The meeting was organized by UN-OHRLS and it aimed to consult on the implementation of the VPoA as well as on the responses to the impacts of COVID-19 on LLDCs. The meeting also discussed progress made on the implementation of the Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of VPoA.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under Secretary-General and High Representative, UN-OHRLS. Mr. Arman Issetov, Deputy Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN attended the opening session of the meeting as Chair of the Group of LLDCs and delivered remarks. The meeting was attended by participants from 47 different institutions, refer to the participants list attached as Annex I.

## **Opening Session**

**Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS,** welcomed all participants to the meeting. He highlighted that collective and cooperative work among UN agencies at the global, regional sub-regional and national levels, based on their mandates and comparative advantages, was vital to ensure efficient use of resources as well as achieving greater strides in providing the needed support to the constituents. He therefore emphasised the importance of the IACG meetings and he assured the meeting participants of his full commitment. He emphasised that the effective implementation of the VPoA remained a priority area of work for OHRLS. He further emphasised that ensuring synergies and complementarities and enhancing capacity-building in LLDCs by relevant UN Agencies and other international and regional organisations remained fundamental to achieving this goal. He assured the meeting that OHRLS would continue to foster coherence in the follow-up and monitoring processes of the 2030 Agenda and the VPoA, as well as other global agreements and processes.

Mr. Rattray highlighted that the 2021 High-level Political Forum emphasized the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable countries including the LLDCs. He noted that whilst developed countries were making headway towards reducing the spread of the virus and rebuilding their economies, many LLDCs were still experiencing massive surges of the virus and their economies were plunging further into depression. Briefing on the impact of the pandemic on LLDCs, he highlighted that the pandemic had abruptly halted progress towards the implementation of the VPoA and therefore threatened to reverse the modest progress these countries achieved over the years. In view of LLDCs' complete dependence on their transit neighbours for trade and connectivity to the global economy, USG Rattray, highlighted that prevention and mitigation measures imposed by transit neighbours had adversely impacted on

LLDCs. He noted that these measures also disrupted the timely delivery of necessary goods to these countries, including food stuff and critical medical equipment and supplies.

Regarding the Secretary-General's Report, he reported that OHRLS had just completed the draft report and he expressed his gratitude to members of the IACG for their substantive contributions to the report. He shared some of the highlights of the report as follows; LLDCs' growth in real GDP plummeted from 4.3% in 2019 to -2.4% in 2020, FDI contracted by 31% to \$15 billion in 2020, exports declined by 40% between April 2019 and April 2020 and their exports continued to decline by as much as 8% towards the end of 2020. He also noted that the tourism sector, one of the major sources of earnings of many LLDCs, fell drastically due to the world-wide lockdown, transport disruptions, and emergency health measures. He also pointed out that the fall of prices and demand for commodities due to the pandemic continued to have a negative impact on LLDCs' balance of payments and had increased their debt vulnerability.

In view of the LLDCs situation, USG Rattray called for more support towards LLDCs to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to implement the VPoA. He emphasised the need to deliver concrete support to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and assist LLDCs in their efforts to build back better. He emphasised the importance of achieving structural transformation and highlighted that the Roadmap for Accelerated implementation of the VPoA served as a solid foundation to strengthen the delivery of support to LLDCs. He recalled that the UN Secretary-General had pledged his support towards the implementation of the Roadmap. He noted that different implementing agencies had reported progress in the implementation of the Roadmap on their contributions to the Secretary-General's report on the VPoA. Mr. Rattray recalled that the Roadmap is a living document and therefore stressed the need to continually review and update the Roadmap to adapt it to evolving challenges.

Mr. Rattray briefed the meeting on OHRLS' support to LLDCs including COVID-19 related support. Some of the activities highlighted included: contributing to fostering dialogues on the global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, assisting LLDCs to formulate positions on COVID-19 related issues, in the form of group statements, along with joint positions by the Office and other United Nations entities. He also informed that OHRLS, in collaboration with Chair of the LLDCs, organized events and these included a session during the Aid for Trade Stocktaking event on the Impact of COVID-19 on LLDCs and its implications for resilient recovery. Other events included, a virtual Meeting on the Impact of COVID-19 and Responses in LLDCs organised in cooperation with UN-DCO and the International Think Tank for LLDCs, and a Virtual training of policymakers from LLDCs and transit countries, on strengthening capacity to develop bankable transport infrastructure projects for enhanced connectivity organised in collaboration with the relevant UN agencies. He also shared that OHRLS and the International Think Tank for LLDCs co-authored a report on the Impact of COVID-19 and Responses in LLDCs.

The High Representative noted that OHRLS launched the Most Vulnerable 91 Dashboard in 2020 to better understand the scale of COVID-19 related financial assistance to support the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. He reported that the campaign has been updated with data on the amounts mobilized by international partners to support the three country groups in tackling the pandemic and includes a tool to track the vaccine doses available in the three groups of countries. He highlighted that data showed that only 5% of the combined population of LLDCs had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. He noted that there was need for concerted advocacy efforts to enhance support for these countries.

In concluding his remarks, he emphasised the need to redouble and deepen the IACG collaborative efforts in order to deliver on the VPoA and the SDGs by 2030, He underscored his commitment to enhancing mutual collaboration and trust while counting on the support of all agencies in achieving this Goal.

**Mr. Arman Issetov, Chair of LLDCs and Deputy Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations**, expressed his gratitude to Mr. Rattray for the invitation to attend the meeting. He also expressed appreciation for the support rendered to LLDCs by the UN entities and international organizations to address their developmental challenges that are due to landlockedness, remoteness and geographical constraints. He recalled the outcome of the midterm review on the implementation of the VPoA held in 2019 which revealed that the implementation of the VPoA was lagging and that the progress was not adequate to achieve the objectives of the VPoA by 2024. He noted that COVID-19 pandemic had also put additional strain on development efforts of LLDCs with devastating effects on health, overall human well-being, and economic development. He highlighted some of the challenges faced by LLDCs including the disruption in the global supply chains and the introduction of non-tariff measures. In addition to the COVID-19 crisis, he highlighted that other challenges affecting LLDCs included climate change, desertification, debt, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and conflicts. He emphasised the need for increased support including towards transport, energy and digital connectivity, improved trade facilitation and smooth flow of goods in transit, and diversification of both markets as well as products, value-addition, increased trade, increased structural economic transformation, enhanced South-South and Triangular cooperation, debt relief, capacity building, technology transfer, and foreign direct investment.

Regarding the Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the VPoA, he thanked the UN Secretary-General for his strong support and the UN-OHRLS for coordinating its development. He noted that the LLDC Ministers of Foreign Affairs adopted the Roadmap in their annual meeting in 2020 and called for its effective implementation. He reported that the Group of LLDCs worked with Member States to ensure that the Roadmap and the terms of reference for the Inter-agency group are referenced to in the annual resolution on LLDCs. He urged all agencies to deliver on the activities indicated in the Roadmap. He informed that as the Chair of the Group, Kazakhstan,

actively engaged in advocating the inclusion of the LLDC issues in important processes including the Financing for Development, High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and others. He concluded by urging all members of the Inter-Agency Group on LLDCs to give priority to supporting LLDCs within their respective mandates and work on concrete initiatives and deliverables in the Roadmap to help LLDCs to overcome their challenges. He was convinced that the constant coordination on the implementation of the Roadmap is a key prerequisite to having practical outcomes of joint efforts. Finally, he reaffirmed LLDC Group's strong commitment to working closely with all agencies.

### **Remarks by Principals of Organizations**

**Mr. Michael Lodge, Secretary General, International Seabed Authority**, reported that ISA provided support to LLDCs in terms of capacity development in marine science, especially for women, access to marine scientific research and ensuring full participation in deep sea exploration. He indicated that ISA continued to take an active interest in the work of UN-OHRLLS and was pleased to see ISA's commitments fully reflected in the Roadmap. He underscored that ISA had also started to work in earnest to turn the commitments into action. He informed that following the adoption by the ISA Assembly of its decision ISBA/26/A/18 in December 2020, ISA was in the process of developing a dedicated capacity development strategy which aimed to address the needs identified by LLDCs. He noted that in line with the same decision, the ISA Secretariat had issued a call for Members to nominate National Focal Points for capacity development (NAFOP and, 39 nominations had been received including from 3 LLDCS (Eswatini, Lao, Nepal).

With a view to raising awareness of potential benefits to LLDCs ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and participating in activities in the international seabed area (deep sea exploration, exploitation, marine scientific research), he reported that ISA has developed a dedicated publication aimed at informing LLDCs of the potential benefits offered to them by UNCLOS. This publication, entitled "Landlocked developing countries and the law of the sea: an ocean of opportunity", along with sister publications aimed at LDCs and SIDS. He informed that the publications would be launched in September 2021. He further informed that on 8 March 2021, ISA together with UN-OHRLLS joined hands to advance empowerment and leadership of women in marine scientific research through the joint implementation of the "Women in Deep-Sea Research" project which focused on women scientists from developing States and in particular those from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. He noted that ISA and UNOHRLLS organized a high-level webinar to identify the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women scientists from LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS in engaging in deep-sea research disciplines and leadership positions. He further noted that the Chair of the Groups of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS to the UN participated and shared insightful perspectives on what could be done to improve the situation. He informed that as a first major deliverable under the project, a gender mapping and analysis of barriers would be conducted between July and October 2021 for selected countries in

LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. He highlighted that several countries have been contacted to identify a focal point to enable data collection.

Mr. Lodge reiterated that ISA remain fully committed to support the aspirations of LLDCs as expressed in the Roadmap. He recalled that UNCLOS recognizes and places special emphasis on the needs of developing landlocked States, including the right to participate in exploitation of living resources in the EEZ, to flag vessels and conduct innocent passage, and the right of access to and from the sea and freedom of transit. He noted that these rights are fundamental to achieving the outcomes of the VPoA. He further noted that as far as the ISA and the deep sea was concerned, the rights of developing landlocked States were even more explicit and the rights include the right to participate in deep sea mineral exploration and marine scientific research as well as to share in the financial and economic benefits from deep sea minerals. He continued to urge the LLDCs, who make up 10% of the membership of ISA, to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them under UNCLOS, and the remaining 12 LLDCs who were not yet party to UNCLOS to become parties as soon as possible.

**Mr. Jeffrey Schlagenhauf, Deputy Secretary General, OECD**, stated that the year of 2020 has been uniquely challenging for the world, but particularly for LLDCs. He noted that the disruptions were seen in trade flows, supply chains, and in foreign direct investment, which had put decades of progress in many LLDCs at risk. He highlighted that these trends directly affect one of the six pillars of the VPoA: Ensuring that there is sufficient financing and means of implementation to promote the integration of LLDCs into the global economy. He noted however that fortunately, several bilateral and multilateral donors responded to the crisis by increasing their official development financing in 2020. He highlighted that the preliminary data from the OECD showed an increase of 3.5% in real terms reaching its highest level ever recorded and benefiting all categories of countries. He however noted that the ODA was and would always be insufficient. In this regard he advised that as LLDCs transition from one stage of development to the next, it was necessary that support was not removed immediately, but that the financing mix was adequate to consolidate the transition. He highlighted that in this regard OECD committed in 2020 to lead work on transition finance, and over the past 12 months investigated what “adequate transition finance” might look like for LLDCs. He emphasized that the goal was to identify the specific financing challenges for LLDCs, and to help countries anticipate and prepare the evolution of their financing mix as they move to the next stage in their development path.

He noted that LLDCs face structural vulnerabilities that require continued investments in infrastructure, business competitiveness and access to global markets. He further noted that the OECD’s “Transition finance toolkit”, already piloted in various countries, showed that most LLDCs face specific financing challenges, including difficulties in attracting private capital and mobilizing domestic resources. He highlighted that many also faced challenges related to debt sustainability, in part due to higher external debt levels and in most cases, ODA remained an important

component of their financing mix at each stage of their development. He informed that during 2020, OECD had upgraded “Transition Finance Toolkit” to tailor the analysis to LLDCs while publishing a Transition Finance Dashboard, which could be found on the OECD website, and where specific financing challenges faced by LLDCs could be explored. He further informed that OECD had issued operational guidance to help governments and their development partners conduct their own transition finance analyses. He invited all participants to review the analyses for both Uganda and Zambia. He confirmed the continued support of OECD in the recovery and economic transition of land-locked developing countries.

**Ms. Maria Francesca Spatolisano, OIC of the Secretary-General’s Office of the Envoy on Technology and Assistant Secretary-General, DESA,** welcomed Mr. Courtenay Rattray into the team of the UN Secretariat and expressed the readiness to continue to support the Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, in particular focusing on a number of policy areas such as sustainable transport, energy, water, and science, technology and innovation. She continued by mentioning several actions taken including in the Inter-agency task team on the Technology Facilitation Mechanism on the 2030 connected database about open source, Global Sustainable Transport Conference which would take place in October in China (specific attention to the challenges of landlocked countries), the Mid-term review on Water Action of decade and the High-level Dialogue on Energy. She assured the meeting of her commitment to the LLDCs Group as well as support to the work of OHRLS on the implementation of the VPoA. As the Office of the Envoy on Technology, she stressed the importance of digital opportunities to LLDCs for promoting better recovery from the difficulties of the pandemic which had been exacerbated for many people and countries. She noted that although the internet penetration rate in LLDCs had increased by almost 10 per cent between 2014 and 2019, the 2019 rate of 27.4 per cent remained far below the world average of 51.4 per cent, which meant that more than 7 in 10 people in LLDCs did not have access to the internet. She emphasized that a lot needed to be done.

Ms. Maria Francesca Spatolisano informed that the Office of the Envoy on Technology in the UN had the task to implement the Secretary General’s Roadmap on digital cooperation. She further informed that among the various paths and actions, the support of the Office would focus on basic connectivity and internet access and she highlighted that these matched the objectives of the VPoA that called for the LLDCs to make universal broadband policy, to promote open and affordable internet access for all, and to address the digital divide. She emphasized three urgent priorities in this area: First affordability must be ensured to achieve connectivity. She noted that her Office had started to explore various means because sometimes fiber or submarine cables can or cannot be the solution as there are other problems including transit infrastructure. She noted that her office was working closely with Member States to find the best solution adapted to the differences in different countries. Second, digital illiteracy. She noted the need to invest in education and digital capacity building. Third, she emphasized the need to share best practices

and information, and to have the network which allows countries to learn from each other and to mitigate challenges.

**Ms. Ligia Noronha, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UNEP, New York Office**, congratulated Mr. Courtenay Rattray for his new post. After acknowledging the important development challenges faced by LLDCs, she added that the environment was a key issue for development and therefore must be considered. She informed that UNEP put together an inclusive process, a 4-year Medium-term Strategy which was endorsed by Member States during the 5th UN Environment Assembly in February 2021. She emphasized that UNEP works to leave no one behind while increasing its focus on the special needs of disaster and conflict affected States. She highlighted that UNEP would address the special needs of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS including by facilitating access to finance technology and innovative solutions to help build more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive economies and societies in the post-COVID 19 world. She pointed out that UNEP works to amplify the voices of those most vulnerable to environmental degradation including women, indigenous people, and their communities.

Ms. Noronha noted that the “Making Peace with Nature” report which was recently launched by UN Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director highlighted the world’s triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution, and how collective determination must be urgently applied to protecting and restoring the planet which is key to human development most particularly those in the LDCs who have fewer opportunities. She noted that the triple planetary crisis was recently marked by the UN SG as the number one existential threat requiring urgent efforts to redress the state of the planet. She highlighted that UNEP would continue supporting Member States including LLDCs on the environmental dimension, sustainable development and other cross-cutting issues that aligned with the priorities of the VPoA. To advance the decade of ambitious actions to deliver the goals by 2030, she affirmed the commitment of UNEP to support OHRLS in its planning going forward.

**Ambassador Mr. Sheikh Mohammed Belal, Managing Director, CFC**, stated that as a small international financial organization, CFC had worked on the theme of international investment for the last 30 years. He expressed his deep appreciation for the leadership and commitment of Kazakhstan to the work of the LLDCs. He was also content to see that Millennials were included into the work scope which could become a routine and norm rather than an exception. He noted that ending poverty requires long term solutions that address food cost and he however expressed concern that from the experience in the field, it was noticeable that in the domain of agriculture, small product farmers continue to live in poverty. He took the coffee industry as the case in point. He noted that despite decades of initiatives to improve farm productivity and diversification, most farmers continue to receive next to nothing from the industry success. He indicated that every 5 dollars latte purchased, a coffee farmer earned only 2 cents. He noted that technologies like blockchain and other distributed ledgers could offer solution. He informed

that CFC was engaged on a blockchain project with a coffee grind off taker in the value chain. He highlighted that if successfully implemented, the project could be used as a template on how to increase productivity in the value chain. He emphasized that to achieve this goal, more focus on data driven agriculture, digital agriculture, digitalization, trade readiness of women was needed for the LLDCs. He called on the UN Technology Bank to allocate resources to guide the Fund proactively.

He indicated that CFC committed around US\$16 million for projects to the deployment of innovative enterprises in commodity sector in LLDCs during 2021 and 2025 but noted that the contribution can be increased significantly. He informed that CFC was working with Member States driven working groups to form a Commodity Investment Facility as early as the year of 2022. He noted that if successfully launched, CFC would escalate its contributions to the VPoA. He also indicated that the Fund was experiencing and exploring to help dedicated single country project for countries that are both LDCs and LLDC. He noted that it was necessary to have tailor-made projects for countries like Afghanistan at the moment of transition. He advised that countries should go after commodity-by-commodity value chain and see how to bring fair price for forward production. He highlighted that first, it was necessary to have Millennial generation (people born between 1981 and 1996) who are committed to implementing SDGs, while seeking to make a new world, in which individual opportunity and fulfillment were consistent and collective. He noted that the UN Security Council Resolution UNSCR 2250 adopted unanimously on 9 December 2015 could pilot the involvement of Millennials. He highlighted that the good news was that Millennials' special supports were forcing most organizations to conform environmental, social and government plans. He urged OHRLS to design and build the bridges between global investors and Millennials, including small producers as well as SMEs in the developing world.

**Update on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, including on the response to the impacts of COVID-19 and on activities in the Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of VPoA**

**Mr. Paul Akiwumi, Director, Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programme, UNCTAD,** highlighted 10 areas where UNCTAD continued to provide support to LLDCs the first area he highlighted was Productive Capacity Index which assesses the productive capacity gap in LLDCs and several countries and offers the opportunity to help governments formulate better policies, more direct strategic policies, and benchmark the achievement. The second area he highlighted was the export diversification and structural transformation in LLDCs and regarding this area he noted that UNCTAD continued to help countries to harness export potential in healthy food, while working with CFC to look at new areas for export diversification. He informed that the third area focused on attracting and harnessing FDI for development through training to investment promotion agencies in Africa and in African LLDCs on facilitation of investment in SDG projects.

He noted that officials from Botswana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and others benefited from the training. He highlighted that UNCTAD also provided technical assistance programmes to investment promotion agencies in Eswatini and Uganda with regard to trade logistics while working with LLDCs to best manage supply value chain during the COVID-19 crisis, and with 5 UN Regional Economic Commissions in response to COVID on these issues. Furthermore, he noted that UNCTAD completed projects in some LLDCs on tourism, transport, and financial services, and impacts of COVID-19 on these services.

The fifth area he highlighted was support towards implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as well as support towards the National Trade Facilitation Committees. He noted that UNCTAD worked closely with 12 LLDCs and 15 transit partner countries to develop Trade Facilitation strategies. He also highlighted the other area of support focused on strengthening transport corridors and he pointed out that UNCTAD worked actively in trans-Saharan Corridor, and in collaboration with IsDB, worked on Northern Corridor in East Africa, Sustainable Free Transport and PPPs in transport in the last period within LLDCs. Regarding automated system in customs, he indicated that ASYCUDA world system started operating in 21 LLDCs with the help of UNCTAD on the management and adaptation of the system in relation to the COVID crisis. He highlighted other areas which were not directly related to the Roadmap but were directly related to the problems facing LLDCs and these included debt management and financial assistance, such as The **Debt Management** and Financial Analysis System (DMFAS) and debt management programme which helped countries account for, report on national financial circumstances, and improve transparency and accountability. Taking note of the importance of digital technology and E-commerce, he stated that UNCTAD has been actively developing E-trade readiness assessment and undertaken it in 7 LLDCs by providing snapshot of the E-commerce ecosystem in these countries including ICT infrastructure, payment solutions, trade facilitation logistics, legal and regulatory frameworks, skills development, and access to financing. He also informed that UNCTAD completed the work of peer review on competition law and policy in Malawi which was published in June 2021.

**Mr. Chi Dung Duong, Director, Division for Least Developed Countries, Regional and National Development Sector, WIPO**, conveyed sincere congratulations extended by Mr. Director General of WIPO to Mr. Courtenay Rattray. He also expressed his gratitude to Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu for her dedication, tireless efforts and active contribution to strengthening UN works to help the most vulnerable countries in such difficult and challenging time during her last 4 years of tenure.

He noted that as part of the UN family, WIPO remained committed to contributing to the implementation of the SDGs and its associated targets for the benefits of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. In this regard, he reiterated the commitment of the Organization to support and contribute to the process of the accelerated implementation of the VPoA. He highlighted that within the framework of the Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the VPoA, WIPO continued to

provide technical assistance and capacity building activities to the LLDCs in a number of areas such as development of national innovation systems, capacity building to enable effective use of **intellectual property** system for development and economic growth, access and use of technical scientific and patent information for technological capacity building, capacity building on transfer appropriate technologies for development, and assisting universities and research institutes on establishing and functioning of technology transfer offices.

Mr. Duong highlighted that WIPO provided technical assistance and services to several LLDCs that are also LDCs through its division of least developed countries for sector of regional and national development, and other sectors of the organization in IP, innovation and technology capacity building. He noted that the Division was in the process of assisting Royal University of Bhutan in improving their institutional IP policy, for Uganda the Division was implementing capacity building projects on the use of appropriate technologies, specific technical and scientific information as a solution for identified development challenges, and was also providing support for the project on enhancing economic growth by securing IP for traditional medicines through establishing the model traditional pharmacy in Ethiopia. He informed that WIPO also organized capacity building activities to enhance technical capacity for women entrepreneurs in utilizing the IP system, particularly for branding product development and commercialization in Uganda. He further informed that discussions were on-going to implement joint activities on strengthening technology transfer office for Bhutan as well as University in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Duong emphasized that WIPO is undertaking a series of support measures to assist Member States in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic as well as laying the foundation for post-COVID economic recovery efforts, comprising 5 main areas: policy and legislative assistance, technical assistance and capacity building, innovation support and technology transfer, IP dispute resolution, and knowledge resources. He highlighted that as part of enhanced cooperation to support Member States in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, together with WTO and WHO, WIPO jointly offered a series of practical capacity building workshops which have 2 overarching objectives: to enhance the flow of information as the pandemic evolves and to strengthen the capacity of Member States including LLDCs to address the pandemic via equitable access to COVID-19 health technology. He informed that the first workshop on technology transfer and licensing was planned to take place at the second half of September 2021. He noted that the trilateral cooperation was also discussing ways to step up efforts for technical assistance to Member States through the provision of one-stop shop that will make available the full expertise on assessing IP and trade matters of all 3 agencies.

**Mr. Robert Powell, Special Representative to the United Nations, IMF**, highlighted that the outlook of the global economy was becoming brighter because millions of people were benefiting from vaccinations, he however noted that the crisis continues to cast a shadow over most of the LLDCs. He accentuated that IMF urged policy makers to take actions by giving a fair shot to everyone, not only in people's arm but also in people's life in vulnerable economies. He

highlighted 3 priorities. First was the fair shot of vaccine. He stressed that to truly end the pandemic, policy makers must take actions to vaccinate at least 60 per cent of the population all over the world including in LLDCs by the middle of 2022. He informed that together with the World Bank, WHO, WTO and others, IMF had created a fund to accelerate rollout of the pandemic plan. He noted that according to the estimates, it would cost around US\$50 billion for the world, but the potential payout was many times bigger estimated at US\$9 trillion up to 2025.

Mr. Powell indicated that the second priority was to ensure LLDCs receive fair shot for the recovery in countries where infections were rapidly rising, and therefore it was critical that health care and vulnerable households and firms continue to receive support, which requires targeted fiscal measures with incredible medium term macroeconomic framework. He emphasized that public investment should be scaled up in green projects, digital infrastructure, health and education. He highlighted that many LLDCs need significantly more domestic revenue mobilization, more external concessional financing, and grants, and in some cases more help in dealing with high level of debt. He noted that IMF had therefore stepped up to support the LLDCs in an unprecedented manner during the pandemic. He indicated that 22 Countries among 32 LLDCs have received emergency financing with a total amount of US\$6.2 billion in response to the pandemic. He further indicated that 12 of the poorest LLDCs have received debt relief on their obligations to the fund with major recipients including Afghanistan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

Mr. Powell informed that the membership of IMF was backing a new allocation of special drawing rights amounting to US\$650 billion, the largest issuance of SDR in the IMF history. He noted that the 32 LLDCs can expect to receive SDR that would help address the long-term global need for reserve asset and provide a substantial liquidity to members especially the most vulnerable. He also noted that IMF was working towards trying to magnify the impact of the new allocation by encouraging additional voluntary channeling some of the SDR. He underscored that there was a fund provided to the LLDCs in terms of capacity development which accounts for about a third of IMF's activities in terms of time consumed to engage with countries. He noted that support to LLDCs included technical assistance, training on fiscal issues like public financial management and tax administration, statistics, monetary, fiscal, and financial issues, and legal issues like anti-money laundering and illicit financial fraud. He reported that the global network of 17 regional capacity development centers coordinated much of the IMF's capacity delivery on the ground, which worked closely with members and development partners to respond quickly to emergent needs. He further reported that in close cooperation and in sustaining follow-up, support to institutions such as Finance Ministries, Central Bank, and Statistical Agencies contributed to the success. He informed that the newest center, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia Regional Capacity Development Center were opened on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. He noted that the Center will provide technical assistance, peer to peer workshops for several LLDCs, which was an important contribution to LLDCs in supporting the progress of implementing the VPoA.

**Mr. Ronald Antonio Q. Butiong, Chief, Regional Cooperation and Integration Thematic Group Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank**, stated that ADB was pleased to be a partner in implementing the VPoA in particular in its 12 LLDC members situated in Central, South, and South-East Asia. He indicated that the programme supported by ADB had been focusing on helping landlocked developing members improve connectivity infrastructure, expand access to regional and global markets, attract international investment, provide increased and diversified regional public goods, particularly strengthen regional health security, address climate change impacts, manage regional disaster risks, and tackle cross border environmental threats. He noted that ADB supported landlocked developing members in these areas by delivering mostly through 3 sub-regional cooperation programmes, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation programme, the Greater Mekong Sub-region GMS Economic Cooperation programme and South Asia Sub-region Economic Cooperation programme, for which the Bank plays the role of Secretariat, knowledge provider, capacity builder, resource mobilizer and lead financier. He highlighted that the multimodal transport connectivity and trade facilitation were key sectors of these programmes which were highly relevant and beneficial to LLDC members.

Regarding the progress on the implementation of the Roadmap he indicated that for the period 2020-2022, ADB planned to continue supporting LLDC members in relevant sectors. He however noted that in general, processing of investment projects had encountered delays due to the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated shifting resources from these projects to pandemic emergency response. On transport, he reported that 23 investment projects amounting to about US\$3.2 billion and covering the subsectors of road, railway, airport and logistics were programmed to improve connectivity which would improve LLDC members' linkages with outside markets, expand their national trade, and support international tourism. He reported that in 2020, 6 projects for US\$760 million were approved, but in 2021, 4 projects so far for US\$400 million were expected to be approved, and processing of the rest of the programme in the transport sector will be deferred to 2022 and 2023. On energy, he reported that 17 investment projects were in the programme amounting to US\$3.6 billion to support power generation, transmission and distribution, oil and gas pipeline, renewable energy, energy sector reform, and institutional capacity strengthening. He highlighted that in 2020, 2 projects for US\$300 million were approved, and in 2021, 1 project for US\$100 million was expected to be processed. He indicated that the rest of the projects in this sector would be deferred to 2022 and 2023.

On agriculture, he highlighted that 8 projects were in the programme for US\$444 million to support the development of agricultural and life cycle value chain, access to agricultural services, and agricultural infrastructures such as irrigation and mitigation of climate-related threats. He noted that a US\$50 million project was in the process of being approved in 2021, and another

project for US\$90 million was expected to be approved later in 2021 and the rest deferred to 2022.

Mr. Butiong highlighted that ADB had provided technical assistance grants to LLDC members in various sectors and areas, including trade and trade facilitation, and industries such as special border economic zone development, tourism, health and agricultural value chain development. He noted that since the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020, ADB had provided substantial assistance to LLDC members to support their emergency response measures. He highlighted that under the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO), ADB had approved 9 projects at the time of reporting, for close to US\$2 billion to help LLDC members by providing counter cyclical budgetary support. He indicated that 5 projects were under processing among LLDC members for about US\$300 million under the Asia-Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX) to procure and deliver the WHO approved vaccines to 5 LLDC members. He indicated that more projects were planned to support the rest of the LLDC members. The CPRO and APVAX projects were expected to help them to reopen their borders, to restart their international trade, and to protect vulnerable groups especially SMEs engaged in international trade, border area communities, and women.

Mr. Butiong indicated that from the regional cooperation perspective, efforts would be made to build health resilience into connectivity and logistics infrastructure. He highlighted that the specific measures would include incorporating health resilience, developing low carbon and green energy, building digital connectivity to bridge the digital divide. Regarding trade and investment, he highlighted that ADB would focus on restarting trade and investment in helping business adapt to the new normal by supporting regional value chains and enhancing their safety and resilience with sanitary and phytosanitary measures, by supporting SMEs in improving access to finance especially to trade and supply chain finance, by helping digital trade through contactless logistics information, automation and electronic payment, by supporting international tourism recovery, and by promoting multi-sectoral and integrated border area development.

**Mr. Wilfried Biya, Permanent Observer of IRENA to UN and the Chief of the New York Office,** conveyed congratulations to Mr. Courtenay Rattray on his new appointment. He reiterated IRENA's commitment to support the IACG, VPoA Roadmap and the LLDCs' energy transition. He indicated that since the last IACG meeting in November 2020, IRENA carried out numerous activities related to the Roadmap. First, IRENA and OHRLS have a joint report on Scaling up Renewable Energy in LLDCs that is in an advanced stage of development, which provides an overview of deployment trends and outline possible actions to scale-up renewable energy to bridge the energy access gap in LLDCs and assist these countries in harnessing the vast socio-economic benefits of renewables. He further indicated that IRENA continued to support countries assess conditions needed to accelerate renewable energy deployment through the Renewable

Readiness Assessment (RRA) tool. He noted that RRA implementation was ongoing for Burkina Faso, Kyrgyzstan and Paraguay and in the process of scoping RRA support for Chad. On the energy- health nexus, he indicated that IRENA, in partnership with the government of Burkina Faso, was conducting an assessment for electrification of rural health facilities to facilitate electricity access to unelectrified rural health centers particularly in relation to the COVID-19 response as applicable. He reported that IRENA was exploring possibilities to provide similar support to additional LLDCs. He further reported that IRENA continued to progressively support member countries in updating their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and enhance renewable energy ambitions under Paris Agreement for the submission prior to COP 26. He noted that engagement with LLDCs stood at 19, and there was a significant progress made. He noted that IRENA continued to support countries in strengthening Investment Frameworks to support the realization of renewable energy projects and in that regard, the Climate Investment Platform, jointly implemented by IRENA and other partners, hosted more than 200 projects. He reported that from 2022, the implementation of the Platform would be further supported through the Investment Forums to be organized in 14 geographic clusters, offering an effective forum for enhanced government-investor dialogue, dedicated project matchmaking and associated capacity building activities.

**Ms. Gladys Bindura Mutangadura, Senior Programme Management Officer at UN-OHRLS** shared highlights of the progress made in the implementation of the VPoA and the Roadmap. She reported that UN-OHRLS conducted two workshops on ‘Strengthening capacity in developing bankable transport infrastructure projects for enhanced connectivity’, in partnership with ECA, ESCAP, ECE, the African development bank, the Asian development bank and UNCTAD. She indicated that one training was targeted at African countries while the other targeted the Asian region. She indicated that a total of 81 policymakers from LLDCs and transit countries were trained in the African region and 27 in the Asian region. She further indicated that UN-OHRLS was consulting with Mongolia and Botswana to support the development of additional bankable transport infrastructure projects.

Related to the current COVID pandemic, Ms. Mutangadura indicated that UN-OHRLS organised a session focusing on LLDCs in the 2021 Aid for Trade Forum, which made recommendations for resilient recovery including the digitalisation of border management measures, the enhanced implementation of the TFA and aid-for-trade support. She indicated that UN-OHRLS also partnered with UNDCO, in cooperation with the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITLDC), to organise a virtual expert meeting with the resident coordinator offices on the impact of COVID-19 and the potential responses from these countries. She reported that in collaboration with ECA, UN-OHRLS also organised an event on leveraging the African continental free trade area to promote smooth functioning of corridors during the pandemic. She further reported that UN-OHRLS held a side event focusing on financing sustainable recovery from COIVID-19 with the Chair of the LLDCs and Turkmenistan and together with UNECE and Turkmenistan, UN-OHRLS also organised an event on Sustainability of Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Caspian Sea Region. She also reported that UN-OHRLS co-organised a session with DESA during the HLPF on restoring the conditions for SDG progress in

African countries, LDCs and LLDCs. She stressed all these COVID-19 related activities have enabled the identification of important recommendations that feed into advocacy work and in the report of the Secretary General. The meetings facilitated experience-sharing amongst LLDCs and other stakeholders.

Regarding the Roadmap, Ms. Mutangadura highlighted that it remained a living document and would be updated based on the inputs shared during the meeting. She also encouraged participant with additional inputs to send them by email before 23 July 2021. She informed that the updated Roadmap will be presented in the upcoming annual ministerial meeting to be held in September 2021. She concluded by highlighting the upcoming events to be organised by UN-OHRLLS and its partners including the LLDC ministerial meeting on trade, WTO ministerial conference, trainings on promoting transport infrastructures and connectivity for policymakers in LLDCs and an LLDC-specific side event at COP-26.

**Mr. Paul Torres, Counsellor in the Development division of WTO**, highlighted that the administration of the WTO had changed since the last meeting and that Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed WTO Director General in early-2021 and has undertaken various activities targeted at LLDCs. One of the activities was a meeting organised with the LLDC group in Geneva to identify the trade challenges faced by LLDCs. Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on trade, he noted that the global trade fell by 5.3% in 2020, which was lower than the 12.9% forecast. He highlighted that the difference between the forecast and the observed decline was attributable to the strong monetary and fiscal stimuli implemented by various governments as well as the large business innovations. He however highlighted that countries' economic situations highly depended on their access to COVID-19 vaccines as well as their financial ability to conduct expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. He noted that given that LLDCs fit neither condition, their ability of their economies to recover from the pandemic was highly limited. He further noted that the rise in COVID-19 cases in some LLDCs required greater access to COVID-19 vaccines. He highlighted that it was in this regard that the WTO joined WHO, the IMF and the World Bank to call for a \$50 billion upfront investment, with the goal of vaccinating at least 40% of people in all countries by the end of this year and 60% by mid-2022.

Mr. Torres emphasised the importance of trade in coping with the crisis since the value of trade in medical supplies had increased by 60% over the past year. He informed that the WTO Director General has therefore been urging members to take measures in three areas: trade facilitation, increasing investment in vaccine manufacturers and transferring intellectual property rights to guarantee an easy access to COVID-19 vaccines. He also noted that the WTO also hoped to make progress in the area of fishery subsidies and encourages member states to reach an agreement before MC12 in early-December (12th Ministerial Conference). He highlighted that such agreement would make a material difference to global fish stocks and would demonstrate the commitment of member states to achieve the SDGs. He noted that whilst the issue of fishery subsidies may seem unrelated to LLDCs, a successful agreement on fishery subsidies could facilitate progress in other key areas during the MC12 such as health, agriculture, gender parity, digitalisation. He expressed the willingness of WTO to work with UN-OHRLLS to assist LLDCs in achieving favourable outcomes at MC12.

**Mr. Roland Friedrich, Director of Programs at IDLO**, stated that since the last meeting in November 2020, IDLO had made efforts to support LLDCs in several priority areas. He noted that as the only international organisation exclusively dedicated to promoting the rule of law and sustainable development, IDLO recognises the difficulty for LLDCs to achieve their goals given their geographical isolation, remoteness to global markets and fragile economic structures. He further noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the challenges and LLDCs were struggling to find the resources necessary for their recovery. He stressed that the pandemic had also shed light on the inadequacies of national and international legal frameworks, leaving LLDCs marginalised. He highlighted that it was in this regard that IDLO's actions were centred around two main priorities.

The first priority is to facilitate the economic transformation of LLDCs by strengthening their ability to track and retain FDI. He noted that to achieve this objective, emphasis should be put on reinforcing the legal institutions and promoting the rule of law, which would lead to a more favourable environment for trade and investment and IDLO had therefore been able to empower various LLDCs on issues related to commercial law, contract enforcement, insolvency and mediation. He informed that in the coming months, IDLO would extend its online mediation platform to additional LLDCs. He noted that IDLO investment program for LDCs was gathering a growing interest from LLDCs (notably: Ethiopia, Bhutan, Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda) seeking legal and technical expertise on investment-related matters including negotiations and dispute settlement. He highlighted that the programme was provided for free thanks to the support of the European Union and the Kuwait Fund for Development.

The second priority is support towards digital modernisation. He highlighted that IDLO had supported the modernisation and digitalisation of the judicial system in the Kyrgyz Republic and Armenia and Kyrgyzstan were also offered technical support through capacity-building on issues related to debt restructuring, insolvency, and contract enforcement.

He noted that IDLO will continue to make progress around these priorities in LLDCs and looked forward to collaborating with UN-OHRLLS as well as any other interested stakeholders.

**Dr. Nata Menabde, Executive director of the WHO office at the UN**, explained that while WHO was not formally taking part in the Roadmap toward the accelerated implementation of the VPoA it was extensively engaged in LLDCs. She noted that as of August 2020, 1000 WHO staff members and 1300 WHO consultants were working in LLDCs, where the pandemic has affected all sectors including health. She highlighted that several LLDCs struggled with the return of migrant workers and these countries included Nepal and Niger as they try to limit the outbreak of COVID-19 cases amongst these populations. He also highlighted that the challenges also emerged from the difficulty to get lifesaving equipment and adequate capacities for COVID-19 testing.

Dr. Menabde accentuated that LLDCs already suffered from these public health problems before the pandemic, which had greatly worsened the situation. He noted that shortages of medical equipment and lack of vaccination had been frequent, resulting in reduced immunisation and

rising cases of not only COVID-19 but also diphtheria, polio and malaria in some LLDCs. She stressed that there was a great need to improve LLDCs' testing capacities as well as their access to vaccines and other health equipment. He highlighted that another key area of support had been to enhance digital and analytical tools in LLDCs, which could greatly help mitigate the pandemic.

Dr. Menabde reiterated the need for LLDCs to vaccinate their populations and highlighted that 28 LLDCs were participating in the COVAX vaccine facility in order to get access to vaccines. He informed that the total number of doses to be provided through the facility in 2021 covers about 3.3% of the world population, which was not enough to prevent the transmission of the virus. She indicated that a strategy specific to LLDCs could be developed at WHO, if there was a strong political commitment and she therefore emphasised the importance of strong political commitment at the international level to deal with the pandemic.

**Mr. Francis Ikome, Chief of the Regional Integration Section, Regional Integration and Trade Division, ECA**, highlighted that ECA was particularly interested in supporting LLDCs, especially as most of these countries were in Africa. He noted that given the challenges faced by these countries, ECA worked to ensure that they were not left behind and was working closely with pan-African institutions such as the African Union to ensure that the priorities of the VPoA are implemented. Nonetheless, Mr. Ikome recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic had greatly hindered the efforts made towards the implementation of the VPoA. He emphasized that ECA consensus-building around the VPoA remained fundamental. He informed that during the ministerial conference held in March 2021, a dedicated presentation was made on the progress and challenges around the implementation of the VPoA. He noted that in collaboration with UN-OHRLLS, ECA tabled a resolution in which African ministers of finance and trade committed once again to the accelerated VPoA Roadmap.

Mr. Ikome emphasized that whilst COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly affected the entire world and the entire African continent, African LLDCs were most affected, in particular due to the closure of borders. He noted it was in this regard that ECA had strived to ensure that borders remain open. He informed that ECA recently convened several ministers that ran the LAPSSET Corridor programme with a view to agree on a revised Roadmap to guide the establishment of the LAPSSET coordination and management framework. He informed that through its African Trade Policy Centre, ECA supported African states, including LLDCs to ratify and implement the AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area). He also informed that at the sub-regional level, ECA supported the development of an EAC AfCFTA Implementation strategy focusing on aligning and integrating trade and economic policies of the EAC with national ones, with the goal of coordinating approaches in value-added industries, the exploitation of raw materials, competitive policies, private sector engagement, and others.

Mr. Ikome pointed out that, in addition, ECA promoted the industrialisation and digitalisation of LLDCs and had in that regard developed and deployed a Training and Research Initiative on Digital Trade Regulatory Integration in Africa. From December 2020 to June 2021, two datasets on digital services trade restrictions and digital trade integration were developed to help assist member

states on digital trade-related issues. He indicated that ECA also carried out a study to assess the gap of the digitalisation of the logistics sector in Ethiopia. The study seeks to improve understanding of digitalisation in the logistics sector, available gaps, and bottlenecks. He reiterated ECA's commitment to remain an interested party in implementing the various dimensions of the VPoA in African LLDCs through its three modes of delivery, namely, knowledge generation, convening stakeholders and operationalisation of development initiatives.

**Mr. Ikuru Nogami, Programme Officer, Office of the Director for Country Programmes, ITC** highlighted that ITC provided a substantial part of its technical assistance virtually through digital channels in the context of COVID-19. He reported that ITC held several virtual sessions in Asian and African LLDCs over the past months focusing on building productive capacity and creating market linkages. He noted that in Lao, ITC initiated a training on how to produce organic coffee, thus offering farmers and small businesses the opportunity to gain knowledge regarding their production, processing, and marketing of coffee. He indicated that other trainings organised by ITC included one on WTO trade facilitation agreement held in Nepal. He further indicated that several Central Asian countries were also able to learn from ITC's experts about how to involve more women and achieve gender parity in international trade.

Mr. Nogami reported that for the Africa region, ITC successfully completed a project supporting the internationalisation and digitalisation of start-ups in Uganda and connecting these start-ups with investors and other entrepreneurs. He highlighted that ITC also supported LLDCs through research and publications and had released the *SME Competitiveness Outlook 2021* highlighting that surviving the pandemic had been particularly challenging for most small businesses due to their lower levels of resilience, especially in LLDCs. He noted that ITC also published a report on *Youth employment and entrepreneurship in the African Continental Free Trade Area* and the report examined how young Africans could benefit from the Agreement and it presented recommendations to increase youth awareness, strengthen the digitalisation of African economies and access to finance. He emphasised that the AfCFTA could greatly benefit African countries, notably by promoting youth-led enterprises. He concluded by reiterating ITC's full support to the accelerated implementation of the VPoA, working hand in hand with LLDCs towards the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

**Mr. Moshe N. Kao, Programme Management Officer at UN Technology Bank for LDCs** explained that the UN technology bank continued to prioritise the Istanbul programme of actions (IPoA) for LDCs, with the goal of improving technology and innovation capacities in LDCs and as such, the implementation of IPoA contributes to the objectives of the VPoA. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had adverse effects and was reversing the gains that had been successfully accumulated in the past in both LDCs and LLDCs. He stressed that the pandemic had also highlighted the importance of digitalisation, hence the need to close the digital gap and reduce the cost of internet access. He emphasised the need to leverage science technology and innovation to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 while achieving the SDGs and stressed the need to prioritise accelerating digitalisation in LDCs and LLDCs. He also highlighted that it should be undertaken through multi-stakeholder partnerships, which also require enhancing institutions

and human resources to access, adapt and adopt new technologies while guaranteeing an adequate regulatory environment.

Regarding the contribution of the Technology Bank, Mr. Kao indicated that the Bank was engaged in the discussions relating to the creation of a technology transfer platform that would allow transfers of technology to LDCs and LLDCs. He further indicated that the Technology Bank, together with the Turkish research institution, were developing a technology transfer model, which would be piloted in Gambia, before being extended to other LDCs and LLDCs. He informed that the Bank had partnered with the Russian technology transfer office, to facilitate the transfer of Russian technology to LDCs and LLDCs on a voluntary basis. He further informed that to support LDCs, the Technology Bank is undertaking 16 technology needs assessments in 2021 to identify their technology priorities, which include six LLDCs (Afghanistan, Lesotho, Malawi, Nepal, Rwanda, and Zambia). He shared that the Turkish government provided funding to the Bank to support Uganda under the SDG impact accelerator on identifying digital agriculture solutions. He noted that the Bank also planned to provide support on the use of satellite technology for disaster risk management in Malawi, Nepal and Niger. He further noted that the Bank had supported Malawi, Lesotho and DRC to establish their academies of science and that the support would be extended to other LLDCs. He informed that the Bank was in the process of drafting a flag report on science, technology and innovation in LDCs in preparation for the Fifth UN conference on LDCs, which will include numerous case studies of LDCs and LLDCs. He emphasised that the upcoming LDCs Conference should leverage the power of science technology and innovation to address the various challenges faced by LDCs and LLDCs. In concluding, Mr. Kao called for more support to the technology bank, which was financed through donations and contributions.

**Mr. Yusuke Tateno, Economic Affairs Officer in the Section on Countries in Special Situations at ESCAP**, shared highlights of the work of ESCAP related to supporting 12 LLDCs and the implementation of the VPoA. He reported that ESCAP held several meetings and capacity building workshops, notably in the area of transportation and connectivity. The events aimed at improving connectivity of Asian LLDCs to the regional and global supply chains through their greater integration into the regional network of Asian Highways, Trans-Asian railways and dry ports. In the area of trade facilitation, he indicated that ESCAP supported LLDCs in joining the framework agreement on facilitation of cross-border paperless trade. He reported that ESCAP notably assisted Mongolia and Tajikistan in establishing domestic accession procedures and conducted readiness assessments for cross-border paperless trade in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Lao PDR. He further reported that ESCAP worked with central Asian LLDCs, notably through the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy. He noted that the objectives of SPECA largely overlap with those of the VPoA. He recalled that the SPECA economic forum was held in Nov 2020 to foster regional cooperation as a way to support socio-economic recovery from COVID-19 and participants acknowledged digitalisation as being a vector for economic transformation and agreed to scale up the sharing of experiences and expertise in this area. Mr. Tateno emphasised that ESCAP highly values the collaboration with different partners including UN-OHRLLS and strove to maintain and extend these partnerships in the future.

**Ms. Vyara Filipova, Technical Officer at the World Customs Organization**, reported that since the last inter-agency meeting, the World Customs Organization (WCO) had developed new tools and provided capacity-building support to LLDCs and transit countries' customs administrations. She informed that during the reporting period, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan acceded to the revised Kyoto convention, thus bringing the number of LLDC Contracting Parties to 22 (69% of LLDCs). She indicated that the Council of the WCO adopted various tools and policy documents including the resolution on the role of customs in facilitating the transport of critical medicines and vaccines, guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity as well as tools in the E-commerce Package. To support the implementation of the resolution on medicines and vaccines, she indicated that the WCO Secretariat developed a classification reference for vaccines and medical supplies. She noted that customs play an essential role in ensuring that vaccines and medicines can flow seamlessly across borders. She highlighted that to support the implementation of the E-commerce package, the WCO developed Secretariat Notes on expanding the concept of authorised economic operators to E-commerce and on effective and efficient revenue collection in cross-border E-commerce. She further highlighted that the preliminary draft of the WCO railway guidance was reviewed by the Permanent Technical Committee in April 2021. She informed that several capacity-building activities were held in the area of transit, trade and infrastructure development and that WCO held regional workshops relating to disaster management and to e-commerce.

**Mr. Roel Janssens, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE**, reported that UNECE was undertaking a project to develop a set of sustainable transport connectivity indicators to end at the end of 2021. He highlighted that the main objective of the project was to establish reliable tools allowing countries to measure their level of connectivity. He noted that the indicators – following their expansion to other states – would help countries assess the quality of their in-land transport infrastructures, and thus effectively implement the UN agreements in this area. Given the specific challenges that LLDCs face in the sector of transportation, Mr. Janssens argued that these indicators could serve as valuable tools for governance. He reported that the 215 indicators were available on the UNECE website and would be discussed during the following working party on transport transit economics in mid-September. He also reported that UNECE was developing the international transport infrastructure observatory, a geographic information-based platform containing all available data on Euro-Asian transport links. He noted that besides its highly interactive format, the platform also gave governments the opportunity to upload their project proposals, thereby allowing multilateral banks and other investors to assess them and potentially offer funding. He informed about the initiative undertaken by five governments (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Ukraine), which consisted of the creation of a corridor management mechanism focusing on the trans-Caspian corridor connecting Europe and Asia. He reported that these governments had officially put their proposal in writing and the proposal was available on the website.

**Mr. Mansour Ndiaye, Head of Inclusive Growth team, The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP** gave an overview of the work of UNDP whose \$1.5 bn budget was partly used to support LLDCs in key areas including digitalisation, structural transformation, energy, financing, trade facilitation and climate change. He highlighted that UNDP's focus was to help sustain the

digital innovation created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that the UNDP accelerator labs also aimed to scale up solutions in LLDCs. He highlighted that UNDP supported 115 countries, and that the accelerator labs had helped establish 17 local solutions in 2020 and the solutions were available to LLDCs. He informed that UNDP together with the International Telecommunication Union, launched a joint facility to equip people with indispensable digital skills, especially in LLDCs. He also informed that UNDP partnered with Jumia – Uganda's leading E-commerce company – to launch an online platform connecting small companies and consumers.

Regarding support related to the energy sector, he indicated that UNDP was implementing the African Mini-Grids programme (AMP) which covers 18 countries including 8 LLDCs. He noted that the AMP aimed to improve access to energy by enhancing the financial viability while promoting commercial investments. On climate change he noted that the UNDP's Climate Promise was assisting 118 countries in embracing clean technologies, boosting their economies and creating jobs. He stated that the current pandemic called for a combination of concessional financing, debt relief and transformative reforms and therefore UNDP provided support to 71 countries within the Integrated National Financing Framework. He reported that on COVID-19, UNDP had mobilised close to \$1 bn to respond to COVID-19, with particular emphasis on governance, digitalisation, and social protection. He highlighted that UNDP launched a vaccine equity to offer for greater equity, resilience, and sustainability and that three solutions were promoted under the offer: the development of digital solutions allowing a more effective distribution of vaccines, the availability of reliable data and the greening of COVID vaccines. He gave an example that UNDP had developed a project to monitor and evaluate application and to collect data on the preparedness of facilities to treat COVID-19 patients. In concluding his remarks, Mr. Ndiaye indicated that UNDP was supporting Paraguay to improve the quality of living through the integration of mobility, transport, waste-management, and green urban areas.

**Mr. Yoshinobu Takei, Legal Officer, DOALOS/OLA**, highlighted that the International Trade Law division had provided assistance and capacity-building in various areas to LLDCs including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe. He noted that many provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) generate benefits to LLDCs: guaranteed access to and from the sea, freedom of transit, exploitation of non-living resources and right to dispute settlement. He noted however that the link between the maritime legal regime and LLDCs was not only limited to these issues. He stressed that OLA encourages all LLDCs who ratified the UNCLOS to explore ways to derive all the benefits and he encouraged the 12 LLDCs that had not yet ratified the UNCLOS to ratify the agreement. Mr. Takei expressed concern that the level of participation of LLDCs in UNCLOS was disproportionately low, hence the necessity to raise awareness and encourage universal participation. He highlighted that OLA had been involved in various activities and trainings to encourage LLDCs to fully implement UNCLOS and noted that in the context of the UN Nippon foundation programme, numerous virtual trainings had been offered to the alumni of the fellowship programme, which includes seven nationals of LLDCs. He concluded by reiterating OLA's readiness to provide further support to LLDCs and work with other partners, with the objective of assisting LLDCs in implementing the VPoA and its Roadmap.

**Mr. Jorge A Lupano, ECLAC**, reported that ECLAC introduced a new methodology to develop sustainable and connectivity indicators for Paraguay in 2020 and that the new methodology was recently presented to members of the government. Mr. Lupano then gave the floor to **Ms. Mical Laconich, National Consultant in Paraguay**, who contributed to the establishment of this methodology to provide more details on the methodology. Ms. Laconich shared that the methodology contained a set of 161 indicators assessing the connectivity of roads and in-land waterways in Paraguay. More precisely, the indicators evaluated aspects such as border-crossing facilitation, infrastructures, environment by gathering precise information (time at borders, time of navigation...). She noted that looking forward, the indicators could be applied to Bolivia, or even other countries interested in assessing their in-land transport networks. She highlighted that ECLAC was able to bring together three local institutions that used radio frequency identification separately and that have now started to integrate their systems. She noted that the road safety plan developed for Paraguay did not respect the pillars included in the UN global plan of actions for road safety, although national stakeholders were interested in including them. She noted that similarly, Paraguay did not have a climate change adaptation plan for inland transport and had no regulations on the emission of greenhouse gases, despite wide support from various stakeholders. She therefore highlighted that the capacity-building workshops would be organised to encourage countries to complete these projects.

**Ms. Carolina Popovici, Partnerships Specialist at UNOPS**, commenced her intervention by stating that as a demand-driven and self-financed UN agency, UNOPS helped its partners towards the achievement of SDGs and the implementation of VPoA. She noted that given the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation had continued as critical services continued to be provided to those in need. She emphasised that UNOPS had been determined to strengthen the healthcare systems of their partner countries. In addition, UNOPS continues to support countries on issues related to public procurement, project management and infrastructures, focusing on efficiency and quality services. Giving an example, she indicated that UNOPS supported the government of Ethiopia in the procurement of medical equipment (including medical vehicles and laboratory equipment). She also indicated that UNOPS partnered with the World Bank to provide satellite connectivity to schools across the country, thus reducing the adverse effects of the pandemic on education and that UNOPS procured ICT systems and equipment to almost 1500 schools across the country.

Ms. Popovici informed that in Paraguay, UNOPS was working with the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare to strengthen their health system through the procurement of indispensable medical equipment, thereby improving the capacity of Paraguayan health facilities to treat COVID-19 patients. She pointed out that over 20 health centres and hospitals had been enhanced across all regions. She further reported that in Mali, UNOPS, with funding from the World Bank, reconstructed the fishing port of the city of Konna, with the objective of supporting the development of inland fisheries and reducing food insecurity in Mali. She noted that besides the examples, UNOPS strover to support numerous projects in multiple areas (digitalisation, housing, procurement...) to assist countries including LLDCs in this critical time. In concluding her remarks, Ms. Popovici highlighted that UNOPS was currently developing its strategic plan for 2022-2025 to be adopted in September and she stated that the plan would address LLDCs' priorities which

included strengthening health and digital infrastructures, building transportation infrastructures, promoting gender parity...). She stressed that UNOPS stood ready to cooperate with new partners to achieve these goals.

**Mr. Evgeny Ofrikhter, Associate Director and Adviser to Managing Directors for Central Asia & Eastern European Countries, EBRD**, shared highlights of the work of EBRD, which covered LLDCs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. He highlighted that EBRD aimed to help countries undertake economic reforms to facilitate their transition towards market economies. He informed that whilst the EBRD mainly focuses on the private sector, it also assisted public actors, notably for the development of infrastructures. He informed that EBRD had recently adopted The Strategic and Capital Framework, centred around three strategic themes: green, digitalisation and equal opportunities for all.

Mr. Ofrikhter explained that the EBRD considers Central Asia as a strategic region as it connects Europe and Asia and it was for that reason that EBRD was primarily involved in the Central Asian region. He noted that one of the key obstacles to the development of Central Asia as well as other developing countries was the insufficient regional connectivity and numerous infrastructure bottlenecks. In this regard, he emphasised that building and modernising infrastructures in LLDCs must be a priority. He stressed that access to technical assistance, funding, capital investments and loans played an instrumental role in improving the infrastructure connectivity in the Central Asian region and therefore building partnerships between IFIs (international financial institutions) and multilateral donors was crucial to address the needs of LLDCs. Regarding the energy sector, he noted that the Central Asia-South Asia power project (known as CASA 1000) was a relevant example of a project that gathered IFIs and other international donors to transfer the electricity produced in excess in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan which both lack electricity. He noted that to shift away from fossil fuel, a growing number of Central Asian countries committed to invest in renewable energy.

Mr. Ofrikhter also reported that EBRD had worked with various international partners and governments in the sector of transportation, with the objective of raising funds to finance infrastructures. He highlighted that EBRD was committed to increasing the share of green projects to 50% of its whole portfolio. He emphasised that the priority was to expand clean electrification in the transport sector (thus replacing fossil fuel), to improve e-mobility, and to develop digital connectivity. Regarding the EBRD's trade facilitation programme, he reported that EBRD supported 300 projects for a total of €2 bn. Finally, given the capacity shortage in Central Asian LLDCs, the bank was involved in policy dialogue with its international partners to boost FDI, to address issues of gender equality. In conclusion he emphasised the importance of a comprehensive approach to break down all the barriers to regional economic integration to enhance the implementation of valuable projects in Central Asia. In total, the EBRD had invested €14,5 in over 100 projects in the region since 1991.

**Presentation by UNIDO (shared after the meeting).**

Since the last IACG meeting on LLDCs held in November 2020, the executive board of UNIDO has recently approved a project prioritising the implementation of the UN Roadmap for LLDCs. By the

end of the year, UNIDO expects to obtain an internal action plan to execute and trace progress made in the implementation of the UN Roadmap in a coherent manner. Besides, UNIDO made notable progress in various fields. In the field of statistics and research, UNIDO published a series of articles to support the formulation of policies in low-income countries, notably in the areas of digitalisation, industrialisation, and investment. The article published by the UNIDO Director General in May 2021 on “why industrial development matters now more than ever before” indicates that, in developing countries, the manufacturing sector is more productive than the agricultural or tertiary sectors and outperforms the economy as a whole. Since most innovation and technological advances originate in the manufacturing sector, leveraging new technologies in LLDCs would bring a multitude of benefits for manufacturing-led economic growth.

Regarding energy, the UNIDO Vienna Energy Forum was organised last week to facilitate an action-oriented dialogue on sustainable energy for an inclusive pathway that leaves no one behind. At this occasion, the Global Programme for Hydrogen in Industry and the International Hydrogen Energy Center were launched. These initiatives aim to achieve technological breakthroughs, especially in developing countries, in the area of hydrogen transport, production and storage, and enhanced capacity building leading to green hydrogen economies. UNIDO also made progress in the field of environment by signing the Accreditation Master Agreement (AMA) with the Green Climate Fund in June 2021, which aims at supporting UNIDO member states in addressing climate challenges. Several other projects have been formulated to help LLDCs accelerate their industrial shift to low-emission and climate-resilient development. At the request of its Member States, UNIDO is formulating its first Climate Strategy which will have dedicated sections addressing the specific needs of developing countries. Furthermore, UNIDO also released a publication on the Organisation’s work in the area of South-South and triangular industrial cooperation (SSTIC) in February 2021. There are currently 12 SSTC projects in LLDCs. In addition to its projects aimed at revitalising LLDCs’ industrial sectors in response to the pandemic, UNIDO also works towards the recovery and transformation of LLDCs, which could be achieved through digitalisation and updated technologies. Finally, UNIDO reiterates its commitment to enhance collaboration for sustainable economic transformation in LLDCs.

#### **Presentation by IRU (shared after the meeting).**

The IRU is the international organisation that represents 3.5m mobility and logistics companies from over 100 countries.

Let me start my short intervention by thanking UNOHRLS for their work in this difficult COVID-19 time. I want to specifically congratulate UNOHRLS on their global leadership and their unprecedented move to sign with 5 other UN organisations a global call to facilitate transport for LLDCs.

LLDCs were already struggling with their economic situation and COVID-19 just made it worse for them and for the road transport industry. Just a few figures to illustrate how dramatic the situation is:

- In 2020, the road freight transport industry annual revenue losses amounted to 643 billion USD. In 2021 the losses are predicted to hit 347 billion USD which translates to a 13% decline. 5%-10% of freight transport companies have already gone out of business with the consequence that 6 million trucks today stand idle.
- Even worse was the impact on international bus and coach services. In many cases, they came to a complete standstill as there were no destinations open to drive to! Revenue loss in the passenger road transport industry in 2020 was in the order of 500 billion USD. The predicted loss for 2021 is 543 billion USD. 30% of passenger transport companies have laid off staff. In some countries 20-30% of companies operating international services went out of business.

Without road transport companies, who will drive the economic recovery? Despite this basic economic fact, very few governments have deployed dedicated support measures for transport operators. In addition, governments continue to implement completely uncoordinated, and often unnecessary border restrictions which can even be dangerous to our drivers' health.

What we need is that governments urgently recognise the essential role of road transport (and drivers and ensure that they are upgraded in national vaccination schemes) and coordinate at global and cross-border level.

Furthermore, when looking at the way out of the Pandemic it is crucial to make use of the digital tools that already exist.

In a UN report, Secretary General António Guterres stressed the vital contribution of TIR and its IT tools, and the CMR Convention and its e-CMR Protocol to global trade, particularly during the time of COVID-19 as it facilitates the flow of goods across borders without the need for physical human contact.

On the latter one IRU stands ready to work in PPP with UN organisations and governments and we follow a clear road-map to support the accelerated implementation of the VPoA. This Roadmap is based on three pillars:

- Support accession to tried and test UN Convention that facilitate cross border transport - such as the UN TIR convention - currently only 11 out of 32 landlocked countries have ratified the TIR convention and it is a pity to see the lack of progress.
- Accelerate the implementation of digital TIR procedures and in this respect, it is great to see the progress of the adoption of Annex 11 to the TIR convention which accelerates the implementation of digital TIR.
- Expedite the penetration of other electronic transport documents such as e-CMR.

IRU, as an implementing partner of UN Conventions is already taking concrete steps and with competent national authorities, we are implementing concrete e-Corridor Projects including in countries such as Mongolia and Afghanistan.

To conclude: We need global coordination in this difficult time. LLDCs need road transport to recover from COVID-19. We need to focus on digital corridors with facilitated border crossing procedures as this will make road transport more resilient and help Landlocked countries to turn into land-linked countries.

**Concluding Remarks by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, Policy Development, Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS**

Mr. Erdenebileg thanked all speakers for their interventions regarding the achievements made on the implementation of the Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the VPoA. He noted that the high level of participation demonstrates the importance that all the organisations attach to support LLDCs. He reiterated that the Roadmap was a living document and therefore various inputs shared during the meeting would be taken into account to update the Roadmap. Mr. Erdenebileg reminded that LLDCs needed substantial support in order to cope with the current crisis and in that regard, it was crucial that all organisations that attended the meeting continue to collaborate so as to enhance coherence and deliver the activities of the Roadmap.

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## Annex II: Agenda

### **Twelfth Inter-Agency Consultative Group Meeting on the Follow-up and Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs**

**15 July 2021**  
**Virtual meeting (via Microsoft Teams)**

9:00 – 9:40	<p><b>Opening Session</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening remarks by Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS</li><li>• Remarks by Mr. Arman Issetov, Chair of LLDCs and Deputy Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations.</li></ul>
9:40– 12:00	<p><b>Update on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, on activities in the Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of VPoA</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, UN-OHRLS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation by participating organizations on activities undertaken since the last IACG, in particular progress in implementation of activities listed in the Roadmap, brief updates on the response to the impacts of COVID-19 on LLDCs and upcoming activities of importance to LLDCs</li></ul>
11:45 – 12:00	<p><b>Closing Session</b></p> <p><i>Chair: Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, UN-OHRLS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concluding remarks by Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS</li></ul>