

Statement by Lao PDR
WTO Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries
4 November 2021

Excellencies Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of Lao PDR, I would like to take this opportunity to commend **H.E.** for his successful role as a coordinator of the WTO Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) Group. In addition, I would also like to join the others in supporting the “Ministerial Declaration of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries”.

It has been almost 2 years now that we have learned about and lived with the COVID-19 pandemic which has posed unprecedented pressure on our healthcare system and disrupted the global economic chain as it is particularly hard for the LLDCs which depend heavily on connectivity within the region. Since the first year of such pandemic, as a collective response to combat COVID-19 Lao PDR with other countries issued a Joint Ministerial Statement affirming commitment to ensuring supply chain connectivity amidst the COVID-19 situation in order to signal the importance of keeping supply chains open especially freight connectivity and not to impose non-tariff barriers such as exports ban on medical and essential supplies during this COVID-19 period.

As LLDC, we face numerous challenges to trade and investment particularly transportation costs and export related support infrastructures. Lao PDR supports the idea of sharing experiences on trade facilitating measures that have been put in place in response to the COVID-19 crisis in Lao PDR, our experience has shown that bilateral and regional cooperation have played a crucial role in addressing the impact of landlockness. In this context, Lao PDR government has implemented a national policy on transforming a land-locked into land-linked country and identified that trade facilitation is highly crucial for our economic development. We work with our neighbors both in bilateral and regional, these include Associations of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) to ensure a smooth transit.

Excellencies,

It must also be noted that there is an urgency to address the issue of food security in these times of increasing food prices on the international market and the importance of a conducive trade regime to ensure a market-oriented rural sector in low income developing countries as stated in the Declaration that the role of trade in achieving food security, is of critical importance to the LLDCs. In this connection, Lao PDR has also submitted to a draft proposal on Agriculture and Food Security. Lao PDR believes that Food Insecure Low-Income Developing countries (FILIDCs) like Lao PDR itself should be able to specialize their production and their small farmers need: 1) predictable and reasonably stable price for their cash crops; 2) reasonable assurances

that their own food needs will be met in quantities and at prices that they can afford, including in times of scarcity; and 3) a level playing field in the market.

In addition, it is also importance to note the significance of a conducive multilateral trade framework for the promotion of digital inclusion, the development of e-commerce as well as the development of the services sector in LLDCs as stated in the Declaration. We therefore would like to retaliate and call on international organizations and bilateral donors to assist the development of their services sector. Lao PDR has prioritized the importance of technology and digital connectivity. Lao PDR believes that the development of Information Technology capacities is becoming one of the key motors driving for its economy.

As you may be already aware, Lao PDR is also preparing to join the WTO Information Technology Agreement (ITA). We believe that ITA will play an important role in reducing the costs of global trade in technology and increasing accessibility to information technology. Through ITA participation, in doing so will demonstrate our genuine intention in opening our economy and ready to take commitments in line with our level of development. We also believe that is of interest of the WTO to show that LLDCs are willing and able to be fully participate in WTO sectoral agreement which we hope to join both ITA and ITA Expansion and be announced at this MC12.

Moreover, to supplement its efforts in the multilateral trade negotiations, the need to keep pace with the developments in the global economy and as a part of preparing Lao PDR in graduating from LDCs, Lao PDR has been a co-sponsored the WTO member-driven initiatives on the “new” issues on E-Commerce; Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs); and Investment Facilitation for Development which Lao PDR has also submitted a draft proposal on issues related to Investment Facilitation for Development. We have seen the benefits of investment facilitation measures adopted domestically and endorsed the need for a comprehensive and ambitious set of WTO commitments supported by as many WTO Members as possible. Therefore, it is highly important to ensure that the needs of developing members and LDCs are carefully taken into account in such draft agreement particularly in terms of technical assistance and capacity building.

Lao PDR counts on all LLDC Members’ support on our two proposals who share the same benefits and hope that our submissions contribute to the negotiations and help to ensure the successful conclusion by the upcoming MC12. Last but not least, Lao PDR will continue to support the work of the WTO LLDCs Group and continue to play a constructive role in multilateral trading system.