



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JAMES MANZOU,
SECRETARY FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE ON THE LAND LOCKED
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (LLDCs) MINISTERIAL
VIRTUAL MEETING – 4 NOVEMBER 2021**

Your Excellency, Mr Battsetseg Batmunkh, Minister of Foreign Affairs
of Mongolia,

Your Excellency, Muktar Tileubedi, Deputy Prime Minister, and
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan,

Ministers responsible for International Trade,

Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We thank the Co-Chairpersons, for convening and organising this
LLDC Ministerial Meeting, in preparation for the twelfth WTO
Ministerial Conference (MC12).

Zimbabwe reiterates its firm support and commitment to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (VPoA). The theme for this meeting is highly relevant given the unique disruptive socio-economic impact on health, and other trade challenges that Covid-19 brought on our countries.

Chair,

We are meeting at an opportune time when the world is now focusing on post pandemic recovery, notwithstanding the fact that a very small percentage of our people have been vaccinated. We are therefore justifiably concerned that most LLDCs could again find ourselves being left behind in the post Covid-19 recovery.

Excellencies,

As with all countries around the world, we have been negatively affected by Covid-19 pandemic. But our situation of land lockedness has served to further exacerbate the already severe impact on the lives and livelihood of our people, and on the growth and economic development of our economy.

In the area of trade, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the creation of new trade barriers aimed at minimizing the spread of the virus. For example, protectionist measures were imposed by some countries on various goods such as food and pharmaceuticals. These trade barriers led to an increase in the cost of trade, as well as to production and distribution efficiencies. The pandemic induced lockdowns invariably also led to product shortages, massive job losses and company closures,

compounding the negative impact of more than two decades of economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by a number of western countries.

In 2020, Zimbabwe's total trade amounted to USD 9.41 billion, rising by 3.75% from 2019. This was mainly attributed to a significant growth of imports as the country procured covid-19 related protection and prevention related goods. In the first half of 2021, both imports and exports have significantly grown by over 30% compared to same period in 2020. Zimbabwe's borders have remained opened for commercial cargo transportation even during the lockdowns. This assured the nation of food security and of the supply of other essentials.

Excellencies,

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Zimbabwe instituted an export ban on essential pharmaceutical and health-related products, and simultaneously removed import duties on the same in order to enable fast, efficacious treatment and response to Covid-19 infected and affected communities. These measures have been relatively successful, with a total of 5,714,824 million vaccine doses being administered in the country to date.

We are all aware of the inequity in access to vaccine and COVID related medicines and therapeutics which has left most developing countries with low vaccination rates. As a proponent of the TRIPS Waiver, we call on all LLDC members to support the proposal to increase equitable, safe and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines and therapeutics.

The pandemic has interrupted the movement of people, goods and services globally, and has led to serious structural imbalances and logistical challenges in terms of the disruption of transport systems and broader movement restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the virus. In this regard, we note with great concern, the imbalance in demand and supply of shipping capacity which has resulted in a shortage of containers and an escalation of shipping costs. This has serious cost implications for us as LLDCs.

The post pandemic recovery, economic growth and development goals depend heavily on our capacity to advance physical and virtual connectivity. As LLDCs in unique circumstances and with special needs, we need international support measures to develop and modernize our infrastructure services if we are to increase our trade competitiveness.

Digitisation has proven to be a resilience mechanism to foster greater, more efficient trade. To that end, there is need to intensify discussions in the WTO E-Commerce Work Programme to ensure that LLDCs build inclusive digital transformation ecosystems that enhance productive capacities and foster greater trade.

Excellencies,

As I conclude, let me express the hope and wish of my Minister that the LLDC Declaration will contribute and will positively inform the outcome of MC12.

I Thank You

Harare

4 November 2021