

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address this annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries.

The Euro-Asian region hosts about 1/3 of the world's landlocked countries, including some of the largest ones and those who are farthest from open sea. At UNECE, we work to facilitate their integration into the global economy. For example, UNECE is the custodian of 59 legal instruments on safe, sustainable inland transport. 150 UN Member States are contracting parties to at least one of them.

In the coronavirus context, transport and trade facilitation standards and digital technologies can limit physical checks in transit and at borders, thus mitigating infection risk. The same is true for electronic exchange of information and paperless solutions.

UNECE leads several global and regional efforts in these digitalization efforts:

- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, we kick-started accelerated implementation of the eTIR International System. This ensures contactless AND paperless border crossing, reducing transport times by up to 80% and costs by up to 38%.
- Our electronic consignment notes, such as eCMR, allow for electronic tracking and tracing of goods and vehicles.
- Our UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) provides 480 recommendations, trade standards, and tools, used by governments and businesses worldwide.

In immediate response to the pandemic, UNECE created an online “Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19”, to keep vital supply operational. This provides a real-time overview of up-to-date information regarding freight border crossing limitations

globally. We also established an informal Multidisciplinary Advisory Group on Transport Responses to COVID-19, gathering ministries of transport, economy, health, customs committees, road and railway transport operators, shipping companies and logistics providers. The Advisory Group takes stock of challenges to inland transport, and discusses recommendations to increase preparedness for and resilience to future outbreaks.

Beyond our platform for technical dialogue and our transport facilitation tools, we also work on harmonization of technical and regulatory standards, prioritization of infrastructure networks, development of corridors, capacity building, and cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries.

For infrastructure connectivity, a flagship UNECE initiative is the Euro-Asian Transport Links project (EATL). Launched in 2002, it has greatly contributed to making Euro-Asian inland transport a reality. It gathers public and private stakeholders from over 35 countries including from the EU, Central Asia and South Caucasus as well as non-UNECE countries such as Afghanistan, China, India, Pakistan and Mongolia. In a next Phase emphasis will be put on improved coordination mechanisms.

Also of direct interest to LLDCs is the creation of a Unified Railway Law. Once in place, this UNECE-led initiative will enable railway operators to operate within a single legal regime along the entire East-West axis, connecting markets in Europe and Asia.

A key challenges for sustainable infrastructure development remains the lack of funding. We are establishing a web-based International Transport Infrastructure Observatory. It will enable governments to retrieve the data to prepare, benchmark and present their transport infrastructure projects. Financial institutions can use the Observatory to consider, analyse and compare projects from a regional and international perspective and identify those they wish to finance.

There has been great progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action. But more needs to be done to untap the full economic and trade potential of LLDCs. Coordinated actions are required. UNECE stands ready to continue providing the tools and instruments to do just that. Let us work all together for a world that is more sustainably and efficiently connected.

Thank you.