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**UN-OHRLLS**

**Statement by**

**Under-Secretary-General**

**Ms. Rabab Fatima**

**High Representative**

**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small  
Island Developing States**

at the

**LLDC dedicated session during the WTO Public Forum**

**Theme " Enhancing integration of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) into  
global trade for sustainable covid-19 recovery: The role of digital technology"**

**29th September 2022**

**15:45 to 17:00 HRS (Geneva time)**

- **Distinguished Chairperson,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Dear participants,**

**It is a pleasure to join the co-organizers in welcoming you to this event.**

**The world is becoming more closely connected by the day.**

**This closeness has enormous benefits – socially, culturally, and economically.**

**But for those left behind, they remain isolated and offline.**

**When it comes to LLDCs, they can be both physically and digitally isolated.**

**The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the connectivity constraints of the LLDCs.**

**Over the last two years we witnessed severe disruptions of supply chains. This greatly affected the LLDCs.**

**Their trade fell drastically.**

**Their merchandise exports decline by 11.2 per cent in 2020, far above the 7.4% for the rest of the world.**

**The overall share of their global merchandise exports remains below 1 per cent.**

**One of key factors impeding their integration into global trade is their relatively high trade costs and lack of economic diversification.**

**Excellencies,**

**Information communications and technology (ICT) offers a great opportunity to address these long standing issues.**

**Properly utilized, ICT can support LLDC integration into global trade, contribute to their recovery from COVID-19, and ensure they are more resilient for future emergencies.**

**LLDCs and their neighbours stand to greatly gain from the enhanced use of digital tools and technologies to facilitate trade**

**Today, the use of Global Value Chains has become a prominent feature of the international production landscape.**

**Production and sale of low bulk, high value products such as IT components to global value chains and other new technologies, contribute to increased trade capacity of LLDCs.**

**Beyond facilitating trade in goods, digital technologies can improve the LLDCs' capacity to boost trade in services.**

**During the pandemic we saw a rise in the use of e-commerce.**

**Retail e-commerce sales worldwide are estimated to have grown to US\$ 5.21 trillion in 2021 and US\$5.72 trillion in 2022.**

**Although this should represent a major opportunity for LLDCs, they currently find themselves left behind, as they have not been able to ride the same wave of digitalization.**

**There are a number of hurdles for the LLDCs to navigate before these opportunities can be realized.**

**According to ITU, only 34% of the LLDCs population had access to internet in 2021.**

**This limited access is mainly due to relatively high costs and limited affordability.**

**More needs to be done to support LLDCs to enhance their connectivity.**

**Let me briefly touch upon three key issues that are of critical importance for enhancing integration of LLDCs into global trade.**

**First - The investment needed to close the LLDCs ICT infrastructure gap, both hard and soft, far outweighs the resources available from any single source.**

**Attracting finance from many sources is therefore fundamental.**

**LLDCs require targeted support for policy development, financing, new technologies, innovation, and capacity building to achieve effective connectivity.**

**A regional approach to addressing connectivity challenges can reduce the financial burden on individual countries.**

**Enhanced cooperation between LLDCs and their transit neighbors is critical to ease access to submarine communication cables.**

**Second - LLDCs must seek to create an enabling environment to support the development of ICT. I was pleased to see that this was underlined in a recent meeting of the LLDCs Ministers of Foreign Affairs.**

**Third - All stakeholders should act on the call by the LLDCs to enhance support towards ICT connectivity.**

**Excellencies,**

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines international trade as “an engine for inclusive**



**economic growth and poverty reduction, [that] contributes to the promotion of sustainable development.”**

**The continued marginalization of LLDCs from global trade is a clear indication that we will not achieve the SDGs.**

**Their continued marginalization is also denying LLDCs the opportunity to use trade to “build back better” in the wake of the pandemic.**

**Excellencies,**

**I wish to conclude by bringing to your attention that the United Nations General Assembly has decided to convene the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs in 2024.**

**The Conference will provide the opportunity to address these long-standing issues and enhance global commitments towards the LLDCs development.**

**I call on all partners present here today to remain engaged in the preparatory process to ensure an impactful outcome.**

**Let us work harder to deliver on the development priorities of the LLDCs, especially those relating to ICTs and digital technologies. The benefits of this are clearly evident to all.**

**Thank you.**