

**STATEMENT TO BE DELIVERED BY HONOURABLE DAVID MUSABAYANA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF FOREIGN MINISTERS OF LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: 23 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Your Excellency, Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the United Nations General Assembly,

Honourable Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Chairman of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries,

Your Excellency, Mr. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General,

Ms. Fekita Moeloa Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS,

Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Kazakhstan for convening this Ministerial meeting in these unusual circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the commitment of your Government and the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan in New York, to keeping the priorities and aspirations of the LLDC group on the UN development agenda since the beginning of your tenure.

Allow me to also thank and appreciate United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres for his solidarity and support for the Group. We also note, with appreciation, the role played by Under Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, Madam Fekita Utoikamanu and her team in promoting the cause of the LLDCs.

Mr. Chairman,

We are meeting at a critical juncture in the history of humankind, as we celebrate 75 years of the founding of the United Nations. The year 2020 also coincides with the beginning of the Decade of Action and Delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals. We are now also in the last five years of our implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA), which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, we commend the choice of the theme for this meeting which is both timely and appropriate as it reminds us of the urgent need to put all our efforts together to ensure that we achieve the ambitious goals we have set for ourselves to achieve a better life for all.

LLDCs face several challenges arising from their remoteness, landlockedness and geographical isolation. Among these are difficulties in connecting to global trade networks and value chains. These constraints compound the cost of development, while perpetuating poverty and economic distress in our countries.

Addressing these specific challenges requires concrete action at all levels. In that regard, we are pleased that the pandemic has not deterred the UN system's efforts to address our request for a Roadmap to achieve the goals set out in our blueprint, the Vienna Programme of Action. We welcome the Roadmap to accelerate implementation of the VPoA and view it as a vital tool to further align the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action with Agenda 2030.

Mr Chairman,

The Government of Zimbabwe, under the able leadership of His Excellency President Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, continues to mainstream the 2030 Agenda and VPoA into national plans and programs. We are currently working on a five-year National Development Strategy (NDS 1) which will run from 2021-2025 to bolster infrastructure projects crucial in attaining our national aspiration to attain upper middle-income status by 2030. This strategic plan will be followed by another 5-year National Development Strategy (NDS2), whose end will coincide with that of the 2030 Agenda.

We endeavor to develop all modes of connectivity including, air transport, roads, railway, and transmission lines, which are key to enhancing access to global markets. The COVID 19 pandemic has demonstrated that world class ICT infrastructure is a necessity for every country. In this connection, I cannot overemphasize the importance of developing efficient, modern, and reliable infrastructure, including ICT and energy infrastructure. Zimbabwe has thus embarked on modernizing and expanding its strategic infrastructure as a key priority in our national plans and remains firm in its aim to reposition the country into a transport hub for the region.

Mr. Chairman,

As part of its efforts to overcome some of the challenges inherent in its status as a landlocked country, Zimbabwe inaugurated a dry port facility at Walvis Bay, Namibia which will provide a strategic and cheaper gateway to the Atlantic Ocean for local exporters/importers as well as international business entities. The infrastructure is expected to lead to more efficient access to the global supply chain, promote economic growth and development and closer integration with other countries in Southern Africa. In the same vein, Zimbabwe is considering the construction of a railway line linking it to Namibia. Further to these initiatives, efforts are underway to establish four customs (4) dry ports as a way to spur further economic activity.

In the spirit of regional solidarity, together with transit and neighbouring countries, we are working on the smooth implementation of the agreed legal frameworks, transit rules and policies as well as transport and trade facilitation measures. The outbreak of COVID-19, has made this more pertinent as countries around have introduced stringent border controls that have negatively impacted on LLDC's export earnings as well as affecting supply chain. With the current downturn in world trade expected to continue and to be particularly severe for LLDCs, it is now more urgent than ever that we do everything possible to ensure smooth transportation of goods to and from our countries.

In times like these, digital technology becomes central to almost every aspect of our lives as we seek solutions to mitigate the impact of the

pandemic. From vaccine research to online learning models, e-commerce and tools that are enabling millions to work and study from home, the internet is providing a lifeline. However, this global shift assumes that all people have access to the internet. Unfortunately, this is not the case with an estimated 3.6 billion people still not connected to the internet. The global health crisis requires that the international community urgently work towards closing this digital divide. Mr. Chairman and Honourable Ministers, in every crisis, there is a silver lining of opportunity. Let us therefore look at the pandemic as an opportunity to galvanise global action to make the world more connected and thus leave no one behind.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the efforts to sustain its economic development, Zimbabwe has its share of challenges like many other LLDCs. While Government has put in place measures to address some of these challenges, regrettably access to adequate financial resources on the international market has been severely restricted due to the high risk profile of the country on account of unilateral sanctions imposed on the country by some Western countries. In the wake of glaring challenges brought about by COVID 19, the Secretary-General has rightly called for the suspension of such measures given their debilitating impact on the health and other sectors of targeted countries and indeed on global efforts to fight the scourge and revamp the national as well as global economy. We must recall that with COVID 19 in our midst, impeding medical efforts in one country heightens the risk of all countries. We therefore call upon the progressive world to join us in demanding the urgent and unconditional removal of these sanctions on all affected countries.

Mr. Chairman,

As I conclude, let me exhort you, my fellow LLDC countries, together with transit countries and our development partners not to relent in our collective pursuit of a better world for all. In this regard, I join others in calling for increased cooperation and assistance towards the full

implementation of the objectives contained in all six priority areas of the Vienna Program of Action. These lofty goals call for us to prioritize unity and solidarity within our group in all our engagements. Let us therefore take full advantage of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, to set a daring and bold vision for a new decade to transform our world.

I thank you.