Report of the 4th Meeting of Trade Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries

“Unlocking the Trade Potential of LLDCs”

Almaty, Kazakhstan

12 September 2012
Summary

On 12 September 2012, the Ministers responsible for Trade of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) held their fourth meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The theme of the Ministerial Meeting was “Unlocking the Trade Potential of LLDCs”.

The Meeting was attended by over 100 officials including 13 Ministers and deputy ministers responsible for trade and senior officials from LLDCs, and experts from relevant international organizations. The Almaty Programme of Action, adopted by the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and the Donor community on Transit Transport Cooperation, held in 2003 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, provides an international partnership framework that aims to support LLDCs to overcome their inherent geographical difficulties and be better integrated into the world economy.

The Fourth Ministerial Meeting of Trade Ministers was held to develop a common position of the LLDC Group for input into the substantive preparation of the Ten-Year Review Conference of the Almaty Programme; to develop a common position reflecting the needs of the LLDC Group for trade negotiations; and to articulate a common position in general on strategies, new measures and actions to further improve the trade potential of the LLDCs.

The Ministers highlighted the key achievements that have been made in promoting the participation of LLDCs in international trade. The meeting noted the significant increase in trade performance achieved by the LLDCs since 2003. The value of their merchandise exports in nominal terms increased from US $33 billion in 2003 to US $158 billion in 2010. LLDCs have also made some progress in implementing important policy reforms to remove physical and non-physical barriers to their effective participation in international trade. With support from partners, LLDCs and their transit neighbours have made some improvements in the development of transport, and communication infrastructure.

LLDCs and their transit neighbours have also made progress in streamlining administrative procedures, harmonizing trade documents and simplifying border control procedures and better coordination between border agencies to increase efficiency and reduce delays. They have implemented trade facilitation initiatives that have helped reduce time in transit and costs such as use of the single window concept, one stop border controls, modernization and the increased use of ICTs for customs clearance, the establishment of dry ports and inter-modal transit transport systems, and enhancing the reliability of logistics and supply chains.

LLDCs have also taken initiatives to strengthen and establish institutional mechanisms for coordinating work on national transit transport and trade facilitation such as national trade and transit transport facilitation boards or committees and Border Management Committees which have helped the effective coordination and cooperation among the relevant agencies responsible for international trade and transport facilitation.
As a result of all the different initiatives that have been implemented since the adoption of the Almaty Programme, transit time and documentation required for international trade are now lower for a number of LLDCs.

There has been encouraging progress on some of the 8 LLDCs that are in the WTO accession process. WTO’s priority list for accessions based on the maturity of the process in each acceding government shows that Kazakhstan and Lao People Democratic Republic are in the forerunners for ‘early accession’.

Aid-for-Trade commitments to LLDCs have risen steadily since 2002-2005. Total commitments to LLDCs in 2010 stood at US$ 9.1 billion - a more than 100 per cent increase over the original baseline figure of US$ 4.1 billion. LLDCs have benefitted from Aid for Trade through enhanced capacity to mainstream trade within sectoral, national and regional policies.

Participants noted that despite the impressive progress, LLDCs have not yet reached their full trade potential and much more remains to be done in order to increase their trade potential. Some of the major challenges that constrain the ability of LLDCs to fully harness their trade potential include: lack of diversification in exports and high dependence on natural resource commodities; lack of strong productive capacities to improve competitiveness of their exports; persistent high trade transaction costs; inefficient logistics systems resulting in unpredictability in the supply chain of goods; large gaps in infrastructure development including poor quality transport infrastructure and missing links; the stagnation of the Doha Development Round; increased protectionism due to the recent global economic crisis; and the high dependence on the agricultural sector that is being negatively affected by climate change.

At the end of the day, Ministers adopted a Ministerial Declaration which emphasizes among other issues, the need to: develop productive capacities of LLDCs, promote investment, adopt more ambitious and development-friendly text in the trade negotiations that would address the issues that are important for the exports and imports of LLDCs, simplify the WTO accession procedure for LLDCs, increase international support in the form of technical and financial assistance in areas of interest to LLDCs to help them overcome the obstacles imposed by geography, promote the development of the industrial and agriculture sectors, develop the services sector, address new and emerging challenges. The declaration also stressed their expectation that the comprehensive ten-year review conference should come up with a successor programme of action which outlines concrete and comprehensive measures and actions to be pursued by LLDCs, their transit neighbors and their partners to enable the LLDCs to integrate more effectively into the global trading system and move closer to achieving the internationally agreed development goals.
A. Introduction

1. The United Nations Office of the High-Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan organized the 4th Meeting of Ministers responsible for Trade of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) on 12 September 2012, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The theme of the meeting was “Unlocking the Trade Potential of LLDCs”.

2. The meeting was chaired by His Excellency, Mr. Bakytzhan Sagintayev, Minister of Economic Development and Trade Republic of Kazakhstan.

B. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by over 100 delegates, including Ministers and representatives, of the following LLDCs Member States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Niger, Paraguay, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Representatives from UNCTAD, UNDP, UNECA, UNESCAP, UNECE, World Bank, WTO, and the UN-OHRLLS also attended. Participant list is at the end of the report.

C. Opening of the Meeting

4. The meeting opened with a message from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mr Karim Massimov that was delivered by Mr. Bakytzhan Sagintayev, Minister of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The message stressed that the high cost of trade transactions is one of the main predicaments for LLDCs to fully integrate into the international trade system. In the message the Prime Minister recalled that the adoption of the Almaty Declaration for LLDCs in Almaty in 2003 gave an important impetus to the development of LLDCs.

5. Other statements were made by Mr. Akhmetzhan S. Yesimov, Akim (Mayor) of Almaty City, Mr. Kairat Umarov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Chairman of the Group of LLDCs; Mr. Manuel Maria Caceres, Vice Minister of External Affairs and Economic Issues of Paraguay and Coordinator of the Group of LLDCs on matters related to trade and development in Geneva; Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States; Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Deputy Director-General, World Trade Organization; Mr. Petko Draganov, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD; and Ms. Sebnem Akkaya, World Bank Country Manager for Kazakhstan.
6. Mr. Akhmetzhan S. Yesimov, Akim (Mayor) of Almaty City welcomed all the participants to the City of Almaty. He wished that participants would come up with recommendations to improve the trade potential of LLDCs. Mr. Kairat Umarov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, also welcomed participants to Kazakhstan and stressed the importance of the role of trade in the development of the LLDCs. He expressed his wish that the Meeting would review the major progress achieved by LLDCs in promoting their trade, analyze the major challenges faced and come up with strategies that will develop the trade potential of LLDCs.

7. In his opening remarks, Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Lao PDR and current Chair of the LLDCs stressed that the LLDCs had achieved some progress in improving trade facilitation. He outlined the successful trade facilitation initiatives that LLDCs and their transit neighbors have implemented including use of the single window concept, one stop border controls, modernization and the increased use of ICTs for customs clearance, the establishment of dry ports and inter-modal transit transport systems, and enhancing the reliability of logistics and supply chains.

8. Mr. Viyaketh highlighted that the exports for Group that had declined by 42 per cent in 2009 from $154 billion in 2008 increased to $158 billion in 2010. He informed the meeting that the LLDCs are making some progress in acceding to the World Trade Organization and gave his country as an example of a country that has made excellent progress in the accession process. He however noted that despite the impressive progress made LLDCs had not yet reached their full trade potential. He stressed that more work needs to be done to: reduce the persistent high transport costs; improve trade facilitation in order to realistically reduce the high costs associated with crossing the borders; and enhance the productive capacity of LLDCs so as to improve their competitiveness.

9. Mr. Manuel Maria Caceres, Vice Minister of External Affairs and Economic Issues of Paraguay and Coordinator of the Group of LLDCs on matters related to trade and development in Geneva noted that the meeting was taking place within an international economic context that is still fragile and uncertain. He indicated that the LLDC Group has been affected by a series of crises related to energy, food, and the harmful effects of the climate change. He bemoaned that the stagnation of the Doha Development Round might negatively affect the fulfillment of the mandate to incorporate the “development dimension” into the Multilateral Trade System.

10. Mr. Caceres informed the meeting on the activities and tasks that Paraguay has performed as Coordinator of the Group, since the last ministerial meeting. He indicated that Paraguay had mainly worked with the World Trade Organization in some areas related to the negotiations on Trade Facilitation, through the presentation of several proposals related to freedom of transit. He stressed that their intention is to have a legal instrument that contributes to the streamlining of trade, the elimination of barriers that increase costs to LLDCs’ trade, and the
expedited movement of goods. He indicated that Paraguay presented the concerns of the Group and expressed the Group’s needs in the Global Reviews of Aid for Trade held in 2007, 2009 and 2011. He stressed that Aid for Trade can be an essential tool to help the LLDCs to be compensated in some way for their geographical disadvantage, by improving their efficiency and economic competitiveness. He further noted that Paraguay was supporting the eight LLDC Group members that are currently negotiating their accession to the WTO. In this context, they had made an appeal so that these countries of the Group are not requested grants which are beyond their economic, financial and development abilities, and that the particular and unchangeable condition of being a landlocked country be taken into account.

11. In his statement, Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, indicated that this particular Ministerial Meeting on trade had a special significance as it was being held just before the Ten-Year Review Conference of the Almaty Programme that was mandated by the General Assembly’s resolution 66/214 that calls for the convening of the comprehensive ten-year review Conference of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2014. He underscored that geography plays a very important role in the trajectory of economic growth and prosperity stressing that the high cost of transport and infrastructure costs the LLDCs as much as 1.5 to 2 percent of their growth rate. He also indicated other challenges to include limited productive capacity, heavy reliance on primary commodities, lack of export diversification, other supply-side constraints, and limited market access for some of their products.

12. Mr. Acharya noted that since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action there has been increased visibility and recognition of LLDCs on the international level and in the United Nations. He also indicated that LLDCs’ exports had increased since 2003. Similarly improvements had been recorded in transit infrastructure and connectivity, trade facilitation, and increased international support in the form of Official Development Assistance, Aid for Trade, South-South co-operation, and debt relief.

13. He gave suggestions on areas that are of critical importance for increasing the participation of LLDCs in world trade in the context of the upcoming ten-year review of the Almaty Programme of Action. These include: increased investment into hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure or trade facilitation; improved market access for agricultural and non-agricultural goods originating from LLDCs; continued technical support for LLDCs that are in WTO accession process; enhanced regional integration and cooperation; increase in Official Development Assistance, Aid for Trade, foreign direct investment and South-South cooperation; and the need to address trade issues in a coherent and holistic manner ensuring that broader aspects of development are also addressed beyond the transport issues.
14. In her statement, Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Deputy Director-General, World Trade Organization noted that there was an increase in economic growth of LLDCs as a Group from 3.1% in 2009 to 6.6% in 2010 and an increase in exports since 2003. She cautioned that although on the surface these figures showed positive trends, closer examination reveal that not all LLDCs benefit from the positive trends and in those countries that do, much of the increase is due to higher commodity prices which are vulnerable to price volatility. She also expressed concern on the high concentration of LLDCs’ exports both in terms of export market concentration and in the limited diversification of the basket of goods. She stressed that efforts should be focused on maintaining and enhancing these positive trends and ensuring full operationalization of the Almaty Programme of Action.

15. Ms. Rugwabiza noted the possible existence of the threat of protectionism since some countries particularly developed countries, enacted certain measures to bolster growth and employment in their domestic economies after the global financial and economic crisis. She further noted that the negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda had reached an impasse. She however stressed that this impasse should not be mistaken for malaise as WTO Members do have a willingness to look for new ways to address elements of the negotiations, especially those areas of particular importance to developing countries. Ms. Rugwabiza highlighted that Ministers adopted a number of decisions at the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference in December 2011. One in particular was the need to clarify and strengthen the guidelines for LDC accession. She gladly reported that on 25 July 2012 the WTO General Council agreed to and formally adopted such a decision which will bring greater confidence and build more trust in the ability of the WTO to address the specific needs of LDCs in accession.

16. Ms. Rugwabiza informed the meeting that Aid-for-Trade commitments to LLDCs had risen steadily since 2002-2005. Given the impact of the economic crisis on donor budgets she indicated that the prognosis for Aid for Trade commitments for the immediate future is flat. She informed the meeting that the vision for Aid for Trade moving forward is to progressively encompass the concept of "aid and investment for trade" with a strong private sector development component. In this regard, the theme for the next Global Review to be held in July 2013 is ‘connecting value chains' and is aimed at helping developing countries to better access and exploit the potential benefits which value chains offer to them.

17. She informed the meeting that one area that might open the way to results and might be ready for early conclusion in the negotiations on Doha Development Agenda is trade facilitation. She stressed that for LLDCs trade facilitation is a sine qua non for their development. She underscored that all elements of these negotiations- Article V, Article VIII and Article X- were of extreme relevance to LLDCs especially Article V on freedom of transit, was one of the core elements of the Almaty Programme of Action and beyond.
18. In his statement Mr. Petko Draganov, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD highlighted that the LLDCs as a group had recorded an impressive trade performance whereby total exports increased almost fivefold between 2000 and 2010 - growing by more than 20 per cent annually. He indicated that despite this remarkable achievement, the share of the Group in global trade is still modest at 1.04 per cent in 2010 and their exports tended to be concentrated in a few countries and in a few products. He also pointed out that crude oil and natural gas accounted for almost 60 per cent of the total exports, with minerals and metals being the second largest category. He expressed dismay that trade in services other than tourism, which is of economic importance to a few LLDCs, is still limited and with a low exports value.

19. Mr. Draganov highlighted that the Almaty Programme of Action had made a positive impact in several areas. First, the awareness of the challenges faced by LLDCs had increased globally as they were now prominent on the international development agenda, ranging from the Millennium Development Goals and the multi-lateral negotiations in the WTO to the Doha Declaration adopted at the UNCTAD XIII Conference. Second, concrete areas of success in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action can be found in various transit operations and infrastructure projects in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Third, LLDCs increasingly benefit from new regional trade agreements.

20. He suggested that a successor Programme to the Almaty Programme of Action should put great emphasis on transit policy issues, trade facilitation and infrastructure development. He also stressed that strong regional integration and economic specialization that fits the geographical location such as into the production of goods and services that are less sensitive to distance or transport costs would be very beneficial to the LLDCs. In this regard he indicated that LLDCs should promote the production of higher value and lower bulk goods, such as precision instruments, IT components and pharmaceuticals, or services in tourism, education and ICTs.

21. In her statement, Ms. Sebnem Akkaya, World Bank Country Manager for Kazakhstan noted that since the adoption of the Almaty Programme, significant resources at the international level have been devoted to: i) generate a better framework (conventions and treaties have been agreed and signed), ii) provide funding for infrastructure; and iii) support technical assistance. She indicated that as a result costs and time required to trade have been reduced in a number of developing countries. She noted that some key challenges continue to impede the ability of LLDCs to more effectively engage in international trade. She highlighted that recent estimates of the Logistics Performance Index identified the logistical un-friendliness in a number of developing countries, in particular the overregulation, poor quality services and underinvestment.

22. She highlighted the role that the World Bank has played in advancing the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. She emphasized that the World Bank is one of the largest financiers of projects aimed to improve trade and trade facilitation and the efficient functioning of transport corridors. The World
Bank also provides technical assistance at the country-level or to regional institutions, and also administers a donor funded Trade Facilitation Program. Additionally the World Bank through its advocacy role in multilateral initiatives is actively helping advance the trade and trade facilitation agenda globally.

D. General Debate

23. Ministers and officials representing LLDCs made statements.

24. Ms. Jabulile Mashwama, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade of the Kingdom of Swaziland, noted that LLDCs continue to be affected by the fall out arising from the global financial and economic crisis which has reduced the demand for their exports by emerging and developed countries. She noted the progress that her country had made to improve the country’s competitiveness. These include the full operationalization of ASYCUDA; the issuance of all Certificates of Origin by the Swaziland Revenue Authority which has cut costs and processing times for traders; and the ongoing work on reducing the number of documents and declaration points for both imports and exports. She also noted that the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) in which Swaziland is a member, had incorporated Trade Facilitation and Infrastructure Development as part of the five priority areas in the new SACU Work Programme adopted by the SACU Heads of State and Government.

25. She stressed that LLDCs need to embark as a matter of urgency, on an aggressive drive to promote and strengthen not only foreign direct investment, but also domestic investment. She expressed great concern about the re-emergence of rising food prices since many LLDCs were net food importers and drought prone. She strongly suggested that LLDCs should commit to concrete and bold actions to develop the agricultural sector. This should be complemented by action at the global level to effectively address trade distorting measures such as export subsidies and restrictive practices. She also suggested that a successor Programme of Action in addition to transit trade and trade facilitation should also address issues of growing significance to LLDCs, such as South-South- and triangular cooperation; and enhanced transit transport connectivity through regional cooperation.

26. Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Industry and Commerce of Lao PDR noted that Lao PDR’s economy had been growing rapidly in the past decade, largely driven by high investment in natural resource sectors, namely hydro-electric power and minerals, and closer regional economic integration. Real GDP grew at average of 7.1 percent during 2001-2010 and is expected to increase to 7.5 -8 percent during 2011-2015. He indicated that since 2006, Lao PDR’s trade with the rest of the world had grown substantially. As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Lao PDR benefited from the maintenance of relatively low tariffs, and through improved physical infrastructure and connectivity with neighbors. This has resulted in strong growth in cross-border flows of goods, services and investment. Lao PDR was in the final stages of to the WTO. He
pointed out that his country was well advanced in the reform of its licensing regime, customs valuation, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures and Technical Barriers to Trade and Intellectual Property requirements. The country has also reformed numerous other areas, including: trading rights; import regulations; foreign exchange and payments; pricing policy; the investment regime; industrial policy; internal taxes; fees and charges and compliance with WTO export restrictions. He noted that it will be a challenge, however, to implement many of these regulations effectively, and to ensure that the benefits of the reforms are maximized.

27. He informed the meeting that Lao PDR was making itself “land-linked” through intensified trade facilitation. Efforts were being made to introduce automated information systems for customs clearance, along with more modern risk management techniques at the border to reduce clearance times and improve the efficiency of revenue collection. He noted that encouraging steps had been taken to improve inter-agency border coordination through the establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Secretariat in 2010, and the approval by Cabinet of a National Trade Facilitation Strategy and Action Plan in 2011. Efforts were being made to publish information on trade-related processes and procedures as part of related efforts to harmonize and simplify redundant border requirements. However, he remarked that while much of the higher level legal framework now meets WTO norms in terms of transparency and non-discrimination, lower level technical implementation lags behind, resulting in fewer than anticipated actual benefits to the private sector.

28. Mr. Robert K. Sichinga, MP, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry of Zambia stressed that unlocking the trade potential of LLDCs will call for diversification and value-addition to the local products and entail enhancing intra-regional trade among the various regions. He shared the initiatives that his country had undertaken as part of implementing the Almaty Programme of Action. One of the initiatives is the establishment of one stop border post at Chirundu (border with Zimbabwe) that has seen the reduction in time spent from crossing the border from 9 days to 9 hours. He indicated that similar infrastructure developments were being constructed at the other border posts such as Kasumalesa (border with DRC), Katima Mulilo (border with Namibia) and Kazungula (border with Botswana). He also indicated that Zambia is actively involved in setting up intra-Africa trade centers that will help boost intra-regional trade.

29. He called for LLDCs to show commitment to: issues relating to policy at national level; infrastructure development; implementation of regional programmes; operationalization of the Think Tank; collaboration with transit countries; improve competitiveness by focusing on transport and transit issues; address factors contributing to food insecurity in as far as transport and transit costs are concerned; and mitigating the impact climate change in as far as geographical impediments are concerned. He called partners to show commitment to Aid for trade, including support to enhanced integrated framework for LLDCs that are LDCs, support to accession of LLDCs, and provision of additional resources.
30. Mr Ara Petrosyan, Deputy Minister of Economy, Republic of Armenia, noted that as part of implementing the Almaty Programme his Government was undertaking trade liberalization, infrastructure development, capacity building activities, improvement of the business climate and active participation in facilitating international trade. He indicated that his country had acceded to the World Trade Organization in 2003 and this provided wider market access and helped avoid unnecessary obstacles during exportation. His country had concluded Free Trade Agreements with CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyz Republic). He also indicated that Armenia had launched negotiations with the EU to establish Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which will enable 95% of Armenian goods to be exported to the EU duty free. Currently, Armenia benefits from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) treatment granted by the European Union, the United States, Canada, Norway, Switzerland and Japan. He also pointed out that the business climate had improved and Armenia now ranks at 55th position according to the World Bank’s Doing Business 2012 report. He stressed that regional and sub regional cooperation and integration are important for addressing specific problems of transit transport.

31. At the instruction of his Government, Mr. Pablo Guzmán, Vice-Minister of International Trade and Integration of Bolivia made a statement to reiterate the view by Bolivia. “Bolivia at the time when the Convention on Transit Trade of Landlocked States (July 8, 1965), and the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (December 10, 1982) were signed- that the Plurinational State of Bolivia is not a Landlocked State, but a country that has been deprived of its access to sea and its own coast by temporary circumstances. The unrestricted and unconditional right of transit should be recognized in international law as an inherent right of landlocked countries and territories, for reasons of justice and the need to facilitate such transit as a contribution to the overall progress on the basis of equity. Bolivia hopes that in the near future, along with the Republic of Chile, we can find through dialogue a formula to overcome the difficulties that separate us and fix this situation with a solution that includes sovereignty, as established in Resolution 686 of the Organization of American States, in the interests of brotherhood in the Americas and the strengthening of friendship between the peoples of Bolivia and Chile. Bolivia never failed to maintain this view, which is inherent for its national sovereignty, and in signing this statement, leaves evidence of its willingness to cooperate for the development of States without seacoast.”

32. Hon’ble Deependra Bahadur Kshetry, Vice Chairman of National Planning Commission of Nepal called for the international community to create a level playing field in the international trading system so as to allow LLDCs to be able to enhance their participation in international trade. He noted that new challenges including economic downturn and financial crisis, food and energy crises and crisis of climate change were exacerbating the geographical difficulties of LLDCs and these issues need to be addressed in a successor programme of action. He indicated that poor and inadequate road infrastructure, high transportation costs
and other supply-side constraints limited the trading potential of his country. In terms of the progress made in implementing the Almaty Program of Action, he indicated that Nepal had initiated a number of trade facilitation measures, including establishment of dry ports for international trade; harmonization of working days and hours in border customs offices; reduction of number of documents in import and export; simplification of trade and customs procedures; initiatives for rationalizing fees and charges; application of ASYCUDA World with the Brokers Module, Selectivity System and Post Clearance Audit. Additionally, the Single Window System and Electronic Data Interchange were in the process of being introduced to further modernize the Customs administration.

33. He suggested that the international community and development partners should further extend their support and cooperation to address the special needs and concerns of LLDCs and provide increased, targeted, predictable and sustainable financial and technical support along with the fulfillment of all the past commitments relating to Official Development Assistance. He stressed that his country requires foreign direct investment for the development of infrastructure and hydropower.

34. Mr. Manuel Maria Caceres, Vice Minister of External Affairs and Economic Issues of Paraguay stressed that his Government is emphasizing promotion of structural transformation of the economy, diversification of production, opening up and guaranteeing access to external and internal markets and fully connecting with the outside world. As an LLDC, his country gives great importance to trade negotiations, either within a regional or multilateral framework. As a major producer and exporter of agricultural products, his country gives special attention to agricultural negotiations and in this respect the country aims to negotiate better market access and removal of trade distorting measures, such as subsidies and concealed protectionism. In the multilateral negotiations on trade facilitation, his country supports Freedom of Transit proposals for fixed infrastructure aimed at commercialization of energy goods.

35. He suggested that LLDCs should promote diversification by specializing on services whose commercialization does not influence geographical location. In this respect he suggested that LLDCs should work to establish clear rules that may benefit development and will guarantee quality to consumers. He also emphasized the importance of Aid for Trade and technological innovation towards promoting the trade potential of LLDCs. He also mentioned that a particular need of LLDCs in the promotion of connectivity in communication networks, is improving their access to the international fiber optic network which requires large resources.

36. Mr Sekhulumi Ntsoale, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Trade and Industry of Lesotho, underscored the importance of improving trade facilitation for attracting FDI. He indicated that in the past decade, FDI had been one of the key drivers of growth for Lesotho as the country received large investments in the textile and clothing sector mostly driven by preferential market access opportunities through the US African Growth and Opportunity Act. He indicated that his country
established a One-Stop Business Facilitation (OBFC) in 2006 to ease the administration of establishing businesses and obtaining manufacturing and traders’ licenses as well as work permits for foreigners. The OBFC is comprised of: The Department of Trade and Industry; The Lesotho Revenue Authority; The Department of Customs and Excise; The Department of Home Affairs; The Department of Employment and Labor; and The Registrar General. He highlighted the Trade Capacity-Building initiatives that the country has embarked on to address the problem of diversification to include: The Private Sector Competitiveness project; the Enhanced Integrated Framework; and the Lesotho Enterprise Assistance Program.

37. He referred to the bi-lateral relationship between the Lesotho Revenue Authority and South African Revenue Services and how it aims to promote trade facilitation. Sub-regionally, the SACU agreed in 2004 on five key customs initiatives that promote trade facilitation with every country being responsible for one initiative and Lesotho is in charge of ensuring that One-Stop Border Posts are established within SACU. At a regional level, the Sub-Committee on Customs Cooperation and the Sub-Committee on Tax Cooperation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), along with the Amended SADC Trade Protocol and its provisions on Customs cooperation provide a framework for both Customs and Tax activities.

38. He noted that within Southern Africa cross-border transport costs range between 30 and 40% of the price of goods in some cases and this compares poorly with the developed world average of around 4%. These costs are as a result of a range of factors including delays at border posts, duplication of controls and coordination failure between national administrations. He outlined the main constraints, from a Customs point of view, to a smoother movement of trade at border crossings between South Africa and Lesotho to include: Lack of harmonised processes and procedures; Lack of a common platform for the exchange of risk information; Lack of common trader management schemes between the two countries; Multiple inspections for imports and exports; Limited cooperation and exchange of information; and Lack of a common IT platform to enable faster processing of transactions and connectivity between the two administrations. He underscored the importance of the WTO multilateral negotiations in addressing the challenges of the LLDCs and called for the meeting to come up with future actions that can address the Group’s common concerns in the negotiations.

39. Mr. Adylbek Kasymaliyev, Deputy Minister of Economy and Antimonopoly Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic noted that since independence almost all countries of the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia, were taking active steps to promote regional economic integration. He noted that the Kyrgyz Republic is implementing the single window concept to facilitate trade. He also noted that his country is implementing infrastructure projects aimed at improving the physical infrastructure of road and rail networks, the promotion of trade, the use of transit facilities, and energy supply. He also indicated that his Government is strengthening governance and stabilization of individual sectors of the economy, and to restore investor confidence in the country.
40. He also highlighted the plans for the further development of the country’s trade and integration. These include: being part of the Customs Union with Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus; project for the construction of the railway line, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan", which will connect the south-east Asia and Europe; and the visa-free regime for citizens of 44 developed countries for up to 60 days.

41. Mr. Sergiu Ciobanu, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Republic of Moldova noted that his country became a member of WTO in 2001. During and after the WTO accession process, a number of measures were taken in the field of trade facilitation which include: modification of the legislative and normative acts and supplemented in accordance with the WTO agreement in the areas such as intellectual property, services, standardization and certification, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, trade related investment measures, customs valuation of goods, rules of origin of goods, import licensing, anti-dumping measures, countervailing and safeguard measures. He pointed out that his country joined the new Free Trade Agreement of the CIS countries signed on October 18, 2011 and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA 2006). In order to facilitate intraregional trade and economic cooperation, these agreements provide the cancellation of the import and export customs duties, quantitative restrictions and other charges having equivalent effect on trade of most industrial and agro products, eliminate barriers and distortions of trade and facilitate the transit cross-border movement of goods and services.

42. He also highlighted that Moldova benefits from a privileged trade with the European Union through GSP + and was currently in the process of negotiating a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with EU. He also indicated that since 2009, the International Convention on the harmonization of frontier controls of goods (Geneva, October 21, 1982) and the Convention on Temporary Admission (Istanbul, June 26, 1990) entered into force for the Republic of Moldova. Since 2008, the "single window" (one-stop shop) was implemented at the auto crossing points of the state border, and in 2009 the new information system "BORDER" was implemented at the customs border posts, designed to exchange information on-line between participating operators in the "single window".

43. He informed the meeting that in November 2009 the new version of ASYCUDA World Customs Integrated Information System was launched. In addition in 2010 the Integrated Customs Tariff of the Republic of Moldova was developed and implemented. It provides the opportunity for businesses, customs brokers and customs officers, to be accurately informed on all instruments and non-tariff on imports and exports goods. He further noted that in 2010, the trusted trader status (Authorized Economic Operator) was introduced. It provides businesses with a high degree of credibility that meet predetermined requirements, benefiting from customs facilities by reducing the number and duration of documentary and physical checks. He also indicated that from May 2011, the "ASYCUDA World / TIR system" was implemented. It ensures the exchange of information between the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the relevant customs
procedures TIR. The new system ensures efficiency in risk management, sending or receiving automated data, speeding up customs operations related to carriers holding TIR Carnets and increasing security for the whole system of transit of goods across the country.

44. Mr. Mothusi Bruce Rabasha Palai, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the UN and other International organizations in Geneva, noted that after eight years since the launch of the Almaty Programme of Action LLDCs still faced challenges that include disproportionate reliance on agriculture and mining for exports, transport costs that are on the increase, and low trade volumes. He bemoaned that dependence on commodities had rendered LLDCs extremely vulnerable to commodity price volatility and the agriculture sector was being threatened by climate change. He stressed that the creation of a competitive advantage in areas that are not sensitive to transport cost and value addition remains critical. He highlighted the infrastructure development projects that Botswana is undertaking to facilitate quicker and efficient movement of goods across its borders including the construction of a rail/road bridge between Zambia and Botswana along the North-South Corridor, two major railway projects which are still at planning stage - the Trans-Kalahari Railway and Coal Port Project, which is a bilateral project between Namibia and Botswana; the Ponta Techobanine Railway and Port project, which is a tripartite project between Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana and a dry port in Walvis Bay, Namibia. He indicated that plans were afoot to establish One-Stop Border Posts, one with Namibia and another with Zambia.

45. Ambassador Patricia Rwimo, Permanent Secretary, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Posts and Tourism of Burundi noted that her country was benefiting from the membership to the trade agreements under COMESA and EAC that are providing access to larger markets. She indicated that bilateral and regional negotiations (the Economic Partnership Agreement between EAC and EU), and the establishment of the free trade area between COMESA, EAC, SADC, will enable access to a larger market. Internationally, Burundi as a member of the WTO is supporting the negotiation on trade facilitation in the Doha Round, as part of the negotiation groups of ACP countries and the LDCs. She highlighted that her Government had undertaken reforms to improve the business climate to attract domestic and foreign investors by harmonizing and modernizing the legal and regulatory framework for business. The country had also established an institutional framework to promote dialogue and cooperation between the public and private sectors.

46. Mr. Nazaire Pare Director General of External Trade, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Crafts of Burkina Faso noted that during the last decade, real economic growth in Burkina Faso was on average 5.2%. The growth was mainly driven by the primary and tertiary sectors on average, respectively 3.1 and 1.3 percentage points of GDP, and to a lesser extent, the secondary sector to the tune of 0.8 points. He noted that the country had increased its participation in international trade in the past decade and was dominated by the predominance of a few primary products (mainly cotton and gold). He further noted that Burkina Faso had
embarked on a program of building infrastructure and had established a dry port in Bobo Dioulasso. The country was also implementing the Single Window that enables economic operators to do all the formalities relating to the operations of imports or exports in one place. The country was also using ASYCUDA for Customs Administration. He noted that his country had established a road maintenance fund that plays an important role to ensure better management of matters relating to the maintenance of road infrastructure. He noted the road infrastructure developments that his country is undertaking in cooperation with the Cote d'Ivoire.

47. Mr. Geremew Haile, Director, Trade relations and negotiations, of the Ministry of Trade of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, noted that the Government of Ethiopia with the agreement of the Government of Djibouti, had reached a bilateral Agreement on the Utilization of the Port of Djibouti. In this context Ethiopia had introduced a new structural adjustment strategy to the entire logistics chain in import-export activities that aim to facilitate institutional, procedural and logistic bottlenecks contributing to high transport cost. He also indicated that his country introduced, more transparent and simplified procedures in transshipment of load centers, multimodal transport facilities, a dry port scheme and logistic services to encourage and improve goods handling capacities and to provide economies of scale in handling and transit costs, infrastructure capital costs, and running expenses. He outlined the challenges that his country is experiencing in the WTO accession process.

48. Mr. Derby James Grant Makwelero, Director of Trade in the Ministry of Trade of Malawi noted that his country had increased its exports from about US $0.5 billion in 2001 to about US$1.1 billion in 2010. He also indicated that the country’s imports were much more than the exports resulting in a negative trade balance. Imports increased from US$ 0.7 billion in 2001, to US$ 2.2 billion in 2010 and the negative trade balance has worsened over this period. He noted that the major challenges affecting the competitiveness of Malawian exports included supply-side constraints at both production such as water and power supplies and high transport costs. To improve trade facilitation, Malawi introduced a trade facilitation program which includes use of ASYCUDA and one stop border post with Zambia. Malawi had also established a legal framework to reduce the number of documents required to clear goods at its borders from fourteen (14) to five (5). He also indicated that Malawi is yet to introduce e-tracking of cargo and single windows and automated scanning facilities. He also pointed out that his country is shifting from focusing only on traditional agricultural products such as tobacco and tea to others such as legumes and pulses. Apart from agriculture sector, Malawi is also venturing into other sectors such as mining where FDI is in great need.

49. Mr. Fred Ogene, Under Secretary, Ministry of Trade of Uganda noted that his country had embarked on establishing a Single Window system and one stop border posts at Busia, and Malaba on the Kenya/Uganda border and at Katuna and Mirama Hills on the Uganda/Rwanda Border. He indicated that his country had established Border Management Committees at Katuna, Busia, Malaba, and
Mutukula border posts. The aim of the committees is to cordially develop and implement programs for efficient management of day today border operation. His country had introduced an e-tax system for registering and payment of taxes. This has reduced congestion at the offices of the Uganda Revenue Authority and increased tax collection through timely payment of returns and increased on compliance levels. Mr Ogene also noted that Uganda had introduced the Temporary Importation and Export of Vehicles system to facilitate trade in import and exportation of vehicles for purpose of faster clearance.

50. Mr. Fambaoga Myambo, Deputy Director, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, of Zimbabwe, stressed that LLDCs must focus on transforming themselves from landlocked to land-linked countries through development of a network of transnational roads and rail routes that link transport systems, power grids and markets across and beyond sub-regions to facilitate fuller participation in the regional and global economy and by enhancing competitiveness as economic blocs. He commended the efforts made through South-South cooperation on transit transport cooperation between landlocked and transit developing countries. He indicated that Zimbabwe had established a one-stop border post with Zambia at Chirundu and was currently planning to establish one with South Africa at the Beit Bridge Border Post. He indicated that Zimbabwe is at the advanced stages in the construction of a Dry Port at Walvis Bay Sea Port in Namibia. He pointed out that his country was heavily reliant on minerals such as diamonds, platinum, gold and coal as well as agricultural products for export which often have low value addition. He indicated that Zimbabwe has recently launched the National Trade Policy and The Industrial Development Policy 2012 – 2016. The Vision of these policies is to transform Zimbabwe from a producer of primary goods into a producer of processed value-added goods for both the domestic and export market.

E. Presentations on the key issues pertaining to trade and development of LLDCs

51. Senior officials from international organizations made presentations on key issues on the trade potential of LLDCs.

52. The presentation of Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, UN-OHRLLS, covered three key points: First, the reasons why it is important for LLDCs to expand trade beyond current levels; Second, the challenges faced by LLDCs; and Third, recommendations on ways to enhance the ability of LLDCs to promote their trade opportunities. She noted that the major reasons why LLDCs should increase their current trade levels include: a key source of financing for development; to achieve economic growth that is more stable and more sustainable to reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life for their citizens. She indicated the major challenges to include among many the lack of access to the sea; remoteness from major markets; infrastructural bottlenecks in transit transport, energy and communication; other supply-side constraints, cumbersome customs and border-crossing procedures; inadequate regulatory frameworks; as well as weak legal and institutional arrangements and inefficient logistics systems. In order to enhance
the trade potential of LLDCs she called for: promotion of trade facilitation, improved access to agricultural and non-agricultural markets for products of interest to LLDCs, investment in the development and maintenance of physical transport infrastructure, energy and communications systems in landlocked developing countries; promotion of competitive productive supply capacities; economic, financial and legal incentives that encourage foreign direct investment flows; promotion of South-South cooperation notably through deeper regional integration via intra-regional trade; enhanced ODA transfers and Aid for Trade; and the need to promote trade through stronger coordination among the various development actors and in close consultation with the private sector.

53. Mr Taffere Tesfachew, Director Division on Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes UNCTAD noted that the persistent challenges facing LLDCs are related to their geographical location that include lack of adequate infrastructure and efficient transport network which hinders their ability to take advantage of trading opportunities and to develop internationally competitive products. He highlighted issues that deserve extra attention in the preparations of the ten-Year Review Conference of the Almaty programme. First, a new approach to the development strategy is needed to ensure that the policies adopted to assist LLDCs reflect the rapidly changing global economic environment including issues such as rising energy prices, climate change and global economic and financial crisis. Second, give greater attention to policies and strategies for building productive capacities that would enable LLDCs to produce tradable goods that are less dependent on the very constraint that they face. Third, consider development of climate-resilient infrastructure and transport system. Fourth, prioritise the supply of energy. Fifth adopt “developmental regionalism” whose aim is to foster structural change and economic growth in member States - both as goals per se- and- also as a means of collectively linking the region into the global web of market relations.

54. Mr. Ravi Ratnayake, Director, Trade and Investment Division, ESCAP indicated that LLDCs have low trade because of lack of access to the sea and remoteness from major markets, inadequate regulation to deal with behind the border barriers, and an underdeveloped business sector. He indicated that in order to increase their trade potential, regulatory reforms to get rid of behind the border barriers were necessary, development of services necessary for more efficient trade and improved corporate governance and labour markets. He indicated that more aggressive trade and investment policies were necessary. He recommended national level actions to improve trade facilitation to include: simplifying behind-the-border import and export procedures (e.g. single window), participating actively in the negotiations of regional transit agreements, and acceding to global conventions/agreements such as WTO GATT, UNECE TIR Convention, etc. He recommended actions at regional levels to include: Effective conclusion and implementation of transit and transport agreements; Improved coordination and harmonization of procedures across the borders; Admission of vehicles’ liability insurance among relevant countries; Establishment of regional guarantee system; and Simplification of the accession procedures to international conventions or agreements and provision of technical assistance.
55. Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director, Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe noted that the UNECE supports regional and sub-regional cooperation and interconnections in two ways: First through the development of norms, standards and conventions that can be used as the basis for bilateral or multilateral cooperation anywhere in the world, and Secondly, through implementation of projects that are focused on the UNECE region – Which, has 11 landlocked low and middle-income transition economies. She indicated that the UNECE developed the 1975 TIR transit convention which is open to any interested country. After more than 35 years of implementation, the TIR convention now has 68 contracting parties and supports around 3 million TIR transport operations each year, thus widely contributing to trade in our region and beyond. This makes the TIR convention a successful example of the benefits to be gained from broad, rules-based cooperation in the area of trade procedures. She indicated that the Euro Asian Transport Links (EATL) project began as a joint UNECE and ESCAP project working with 18 countries (this has now grown to 27) across Europe and Asia and it promotes Euro-Asian Transport solutions through coordinated planning, investment and priority setting. She also indicated that the UNECE supports cooperation and coordination for border clearance through the UN Convention on Harmonization of Frontier Controls and the joint OSCE and UNECE handbook of best practices at border crossings.

56. Mr. Matthew Wilson, Counselor, WTO, indicated that accession of non-members is a priority for the WTO secretariat. He indicated that 8 of the 26 countries waiting to accede are LLDCs and for 2012, Kazakhstan and Laos were among the forerunners for ‘early accession’. Tajikistan is also a 2012 priority while careful note has been taken of the progress that has been made in Ethiopia and Afghanistan. He also highlighted the benefits achieved from becoming a WTO member. With regard to trade facilitation he indicated that the negotiations in Geneva are focused on 3 elements -Article V Article VIII Article X – on transit matters are an important element of the negotiations and one which the LLDCs have been particularly focused. He also indicated that the SDT pillar is a new and dynamic approach to addressing special treatment for developing countries in trade rules. He noted that Aid for Trade had risen steadily since the baseline date of 2002-2005 and as a result trade has been mainstreamed better into sectoral, national and regional development strategies and have seen processes institutionalized and improved at the national level to better harness the potential of trade for economic and social development.

F. Presentation on the Status of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries

57. Ambassador Suren Badral, Interim Director of the Think Tank on LLDCs, Mongolia, briefed the meeting on the history of the development of the Think Tank that dates back to the Ulaanbaatar Declaration adopted at the Meeting of
Trade Ministers of LLDCs, Ulaanbaatar, 28-29 August 2007. He indicated that the Government of Mongolia had contributed towards the Think Tank by providing appointment and secondment of Interim Director plus one staff member, providing Office premises in the UN Common House and Financing a Study on Assessment of Bilateral Transit Agreements. He noted that the UNDP had assisted in feasibility study and technical support, the UN Legal Office and OHRLLS supported the drafting of the Multilateral Agreement and Treaty Signing Ceremonies and OHRLLS is mobilizing awareness and interest among LLDCs. He indicated that he had received commitments from Heads of WTO, UNCTAD and UNDP to support the Think Tank once it became operational.

58. He noted that as of December 2011, 7 LLDCs had signed the Multilateral Agreement Establishing the International Think Tank for LLDCs and these include Ethiopia, Laos People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Niger, Paraguay, Afghanistan and Armenia. Mongolia had submitted its instrument of approval to the Multilateral Agreement for the establishment of an International Think Tank in November 2011.

59. He highlighted the potential benefits from the Think Tank to include: Maximization of the efficiency of the coordinated efforts for the effective implementation of the internationally agreed provisions, particularly the Almaty Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals; Building of optimal strategies on matters of interest to LLDCs; Learning from best practices of LLDCs; Improving the analytical capability of the LLDCs; Formulation of joint platform for concerted actions of the LLDCs at international fora, including the Trade Facilitation negotiations at the WTO; Campaigning for and raising awareness of challenges faced by the LLDCs; Presenting justification for establishing by the donor community of a specific pipeline of assistance designed to help the LLDCs in improving their economic competitiveness; Research and identification of transit and transport costs that may be offset by other policy measures at national, bilateral and plurilateral (regional) levels; Analysis of benefits of and capacity building for negotiations by the LLDCs on regional trade agreements; and Presenting of portal and digital library of research papers and information on issues of interest to the LLDCs.

60. He indicated that the full operationalization of the International Think Tank will take place when the Agreement enters into force 60 days after Deposit of 10th Instrument of approval. He urged LLDCs that have not yet done so to make effort to become party to the Agreement by depositing an instrument of accession.

G. Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration

61. At the end of the general debate, Mr. Manuel Maria Caceres, Vice Minister of External Affairs and Economic Issues of Paraguay and Coordinator of the Group of LLDCs on matters related to trade and development in Geneva introduced the declaration which was subsequently adopted by the Ministers. The declaration calls for the development of productive capacities of LLDCs, promotion of investment and private sector development, adoption of more ambitious and
development-friendly text that would address the issues that are important for the exports and imports of LLDCs, simplification of the WTO accession procedure for LLDCs, increased international support in the form of technical and financial assistance in areas of interest to LLDCs to help them overcome the obstacles imposed by geography, promotion of the development of the industrial and agriculture sectors, development of the services sector, and addressing new and emerging challenges.

62. The declaration also urges those LLDCs, which have not done so, to accede to the Multilateral Agreement on the establishment of the International Think Tank; and for the full engagement of all stakeholders in the preparatory process of the ten-year review conference of the Almaty Programme of Action and to participation in the conference itself at the highest level possible.

H. Final Provisions

63. The Ministers called upon the United Nations Office of the Higher Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to continue to play its leadership role in coordinating assistance for the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and stressed the importance of its coordinating role for the preparatory process leading to the ten year comprehensive review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

64. Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government and the people of Kazakhstan for hosting the meeting.

65. The Chairman Mr. Bakytzhan Sagintayev and Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Chairman of the Group of LLDCs presented some closing remarks.
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