

Allow me also to express my Government's sincere condolences to the People and the Government of Zambia for the demise of H. E. President Michael Sata.

Mr. Chairman,

~~Honourable Heads of State and Government~~

~~Your Excellencies Ministers and Heads of Delegation~~

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to join previous speakers to express Eritrea's appreciation for the convening ~~today~~ of this august Second United Nations Conference <sup>on</sup> Landlocked Developing Countries to review progress of the Almaty Programme of Action in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 6/214 of December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011.

Let me also avail of the occasion to express our heartfelt gratitude for the hospitality accorded to us by the people and Government of Austria.

The underlying reasons that prompted the first International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries ~~and our International Partners~~ ten-years ago, culminating in the Almaty Programme of Action, are too cogent and vivid to merit additional elaboration here.

The original emphasis was perhaps skewed on the trade encumbrances and infrastructural bottlenecks land locked countries face, with deleterious implications on their economic growth. But these critical logjams also affect, almost to the same degree, transit countries since paucity of finance and investment to develop the requisite infrastructural hardware and professional capacity to refine the administrative and regulatory software will ultimately render their services ineffective, and to that extent, hamper regional/international trade.

In the event, the whole discourse might need to be recast to address the symbiotic trade and commercial cooperation ties between landlocked and transit countries in a more holistic and intertwined manner.

In this respect, a regional architecture and protocol of economic cooperation that transcends limited port transit services to encompass broader areas of mutual economic cooperation will go a long way to address both the hardware and software bottlenecks that have been spelled out in the Report of the UN Secretary General of 25 July, 2011. In many cases, transit countries are in geographical positions to render port transit services to several landlocked and/or adjoining countries. The regional framework can thus create a more convenient platform for

synergetic arrangements. Needless to emphasize, these collective frameworks will not necessarily substitute but only supplant and standardize the commercial service agreements that are usually entered between landlocked and transit countries at a bilateral level.

Indeed, harmonization of transport and transit policies, regulations, procedures and best practices have higher prospects of effectiveness and durability when they are charted out in tandem with other objectives and tasks of all-rounded regional cooperation.

In our region, for instance, the Tripartite COMESA-SADEC-IGAD framework of consultations on harmonization of transport, energy, information and communication technologies can offer a convenient platform to streamline, within the context of broader protocols of cooperation, port transit administrative procedures, and judicious service tariffs and to simplify border control operations.

At the infrastructural level, it is clear that transit countries require substantial capital investment for expansion and modernization of their ports; for the maintenance and construction of main highways that serve transit trade as well as efficient telecommunication and power supply installations. In this regard, provision of soft and concessional loans to transit countries are essential both for the efficiency of transit services and trade as well as to render service charges at much reduced, non-rent seeking, costs.

Finally, the legal framework that governs bilateral transit services ~~and~~ articulated in operative paragraph 6 of the Almaty declaration, namely, "*the right of transit countries, in the exercise of their full sovereignty over their territory, to take all measures necessary to ensure that the rights and facilities provided for landlocked countries in no way infringe upon their legitimate interests*" must be respected fully to preclude potential disagreements and ensure smooth implementation of the various accords.

I thank you