Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to drastically change perspective just for a brief moment. This is a conference about the challenges of being a landlocked country. Being landlocked is by definition being locked away from the vast blue surface of our planet – the ocean. It is quite ironic really, that I, in my brand new capacity as a Minister of International development cooperation in Sweden, would be asked to speak on this High-level Round table on the particular challenges of being landlocked, when I have up until now, both in my political life, and in my former life as a writer, have always been an ardent champion for - let’s call it the other side of the coin – the protection of our oceans! In 2007 I wrote the book “Silent seas”, mainly describing the global problem of overfishing, and I have since then, as a member of the European Parliament, been working very intensively on reforming the destructive EU Common fisheries policy, and dealing with the particular challenges of industrial distant water fishing fleets,
vacuuming the world's oceans, not least in developing countries waters, including the SIDS.

However, the challenges of protecting the oceans, as well as supporting the peoples of landlocked countries - in the end all come down to the same principles - rights and responsibilities of all peoples – principles that are beautifully described in the most successful piece of globally binding legislation the world has produced so far – the UN Law of the Seas (UNCLOS).

In UNCLOS the rights of landlocked countries access to the sea, as well as equitable share of any surplus of living marine resources is clearly described. As well as the notion of “The Area” – the vast part of our oceans that lie beyond national jurisdiction. Are you all aware that 50 per cent of the globe – everything beyond 20 nautical miles from the shorelines - is defined as “The common heritage of Mankind”? And that activities in this area shall be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole – irrespective of whether states are landlocked or not?

So – with this perspective in mind – the benefit of mankind as a whole – I am greatly honoured to make my contribution to this roundtable on achieving structural changes in Landlocked developing states. In an increasingly interconnected world, problems such as Climate change, ocean degradation or political instability is no longer the problems of just a few states, but is the responsibility of humankind. And I believe the 32 landlocked developing countries with a population of 450 million people - with their perspectives and particular problems - are very important players in a world that needs to learn how to cooperate more, not less.
Now, throughout our conference preparations, LLDCs have raised structural transformation as a priority need. Sweden, as co-chair of negotiations towards the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs, to be adopted here on Wednesday, has listened carefully to those concerns.

LLDCs notoriously face vast distances and high transport costs to major markets. They have a locational disadvantage. To some, this handicap is exacerbated by trade barriers and political factors. And yet, it clearly is not the case that all landlocked countries are lagging behind or on the other hand that all coastal states are prospering. Other factors than just geographical location are of course even more important for the wellbeing of people and creation of prosperity in any country.

This is one of my most fundamental messages here today: Being landlocked has important implications for a country’s development strategy, but it does not necessarily undermine the potential for development. LLDCs can make conscious political choices that create intentional societal rewards.

Due to high transport costs, the scope for ‘traditional industrialization’ is smaller in LLDCs than elsewhere. Production of goods with basic technology and low value added is rarely successful. This is a disadvantage that should be turned into an advantage. As land-locked countries it will be hard to compete on the market with other countries that export commodities with low value added, or raw materials. Instead, progress lies in a development strategy that combines investment
in human capital and sustainable, smart technologies with a view to develop comparative advantages that are not ‘God given’.

Export of services that do not require personal contact, such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has proven to be effective since trade in services entail low transportation costs. Tourism and care-based services are other possible niches. In landlocked countries with only limited trade and foreign direct investment, it is important that the government adopts special measures to promote technological change and increase competitiveness.

Sweden’s devotion to free and fair trade works to enhance opportunities for LLDCs. The priority that the Swedish government attaches to bringing the benefits of ICT to developing countries is also of special importance to LLDCs.

In this decisive moment in history where the world needs to address climate change, I am also convinced that landlocked countries must seek comparative advantages by focussing on climate-smart green skills and technologies. Many landlocked countries are already struck by droughts and other natural disasters. Investing in oil and gas pipelines - while the world knows we cannot use four thirds of the known fossil reserves if we want to stay within the 2 degree target - is not a good idea. Investing in clean solar and wind power is – making the LLDC:s self-sufficient in energy would be the greatest comparative advantage imaginable in our time.
Sweden wants to continue to give support that encourages regional transportation and energy systems, including smart supergrids based on renewable energy.

However, infrastructure is not all. Every country has its particular circumstances, and I would like to take the opportunity here to mention the State of Palestine which is a special case of locked-in country, with most of its territory on the West Bank. More than 20 years have passed since “The Oslo Agreement” stated Palestinian Statehood within five years. Yet, Palestine remains under occupation. Sweden’s firm belief is that the appropriate time has come for the recognition of Palestine as an independent state.

Last Thursday, the Government of Sweden recognized the State of Palestine. At the same time, the Swedish government also adopted a five year development cooperation strategy in support of Palestinian state building.

In addition to Sweden’s traditional strong ties with the State of Israel, we will from now on have a relationship of corresponding nature with the other partner in that two-state solution which is seen by the broad world community as the way to achieving lasting peace in the Middle East.

Sweden has a long-standing history of development cooperation. Our ODA has doubled over the past ten years and will remain at 1 % of GDI. Swedish partnerships with LLDCs provide us with appreciation of their conditions. Rwanda and Moldova
beautifully illustrate my point today that strategic policy choices matter.

Moldova, though not far from the heart of Europe, was exceptionally isolated after independence and, indeed, until quite recently. While the Russian market was shut down for political reasons, non-tariff trade barriers inhibited access to EU markets. Strict EU visa requirements further added to the isolation. Swedish support to Moldova, which goes back to the early days of independence, has helped break down the non-geographic barriers. In just eight years, since 2006, Moldova has brought down its national poverty rate by just about half, to 16.6%.

Similarly, in Rwanda, Sweden was early on the scene to assist with economic and social reconstruction of the country after the genocide. During the 20 years that have passed, economic progress has been remarkable. Rwandan exports of top-quality brand named coffee sells at 2-3 times the price of regular coffee. This compensates neatly any costs incurred by geographic location. Rwandan gender equality adds greatly to economic success – the country just climbed to 7th place (out 142) on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index. Women are half of the world’s population. Through education, empowerment and economic opportunity, women double the potential of any country – land-locked, or, let’s call it “gender-locked”!

My message should hopefully be clear by now: LLDCs deserve access to global markets and goods. They merit international support for transportation and communication systems. In that spirit, Sweden has supported this conference, Sweden is a leading
donor in multilateral organisations and Sweden partners with several landlocked countries. On the part of landlocked countries themselves, the best recipe for development is never to accept a role as victim, but to pursue a determined sustainable strategy for comparative advantage. To the benefit not only of their own people – but also for all humankind, which I think is the perspective we should always have.

Thank you.