

The midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action kicks off with Ministers of LLDCs calling for improved trade, transport and economic opportunities

Ministers and senior government officials from landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and development partners, gathered in Astana, Kazakhstan this year, during a two-day Ministerial Meeting on *Achieving the SDGs in Landlocked Developing Countries through Connectivity and Trade Facilitation*, to identify ways in which trade, economic transformation and the development of transport infrastructure can benefit LLDCs.

The event highlighted the importance of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and marks the start of a preparatory process for the comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) to be held in 2019. The midterm review will provide an opportunity to review the progress that has been made in the implementation of the VPoA, a programme recognized as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda.

A new Declaration that calls for improved transport, promotes economic transformation and better trade was adopted at this meeting, to better integrate these countries into the global trading system, especially that they continue to face many challenges including lack of territorial access to the sea, isolation and remoteness from world markets and high transport and transit costs which impose serious constraints on their overall socio-economic development and trade competitiveness.

Ms. Fekita 'Utoikamanu, the High-Representative and Under-Secretary-General for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Islands developing States welcomed the Outcome Declaration saying that “it covers very important areas, crucial for successfully improving the connectivity of the LLDCs and assisting them to harness their trade potential to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, adding that “the meeting provided a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learnt and also provided an opportunity to highlight initiatives that support promotion of connectivity and trade in the LLDCs”.

The Outcome Declaration of the meeting splits into three main sections, in line with the thematic sessions that were held during the first day of the meeting.

On Improving Transport Connectivity, the declaration recognized the critical role of transport, quality infrastructure and transit systems for the LLDCs and the need to enhance soft infrastructure including through harmonization and simplification of cross-border procedures. At the same time, it acknowledged that transport is still inadequate in the LLDCs and missing links are a major problem. Comprehensive actions and partnerships are required to deal with the magnitude of the infrastructure gap. The LLDCs Group called for the international community, in particular multilateral and regional development banks, to provide LLDCs with technical support to develop bankable implementable and financially viable infrastructure and transport projects.

On Promoting Economic Structural Transformation, the LLDCs Group stressed the importance of industrial development and the building of capacities in the productive sectors as means to achieve structural transformation, economic diversification and value addition.

An enabling international economic environment to complement the LLDCs' structural economic transformation efforts is crucial. The Declaration called upon the international community to specifically assist LLDCs in implementing industrial policies, diversifying our export bases, enhancing value addition and strengthening their capacity to integrate into regional and global value chains.

On **Trade and Trade Facilitation**, the importance of a universal, open and nondiscriminatory multilateral trading system was underscored as important means to achieve the SDGs, but the Group expressed concern over the stalemate in the WTO negotiations and an increase in protectionist measures.

The Ministerial Meeting brought together more than 80 participants. The first day took place at Marriott Astana Hotel. On the second day, the meeting moved to the Congress Center of the Capital, where it was held on the side lines of the Astana Economic Forum 2018.

To learn more about the Ministerial Meeting, please click [here](#)

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