UN-OHRLLS

Statement
by
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High Representative
and
Under-Secretary General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States


Opening Session
11 February, 9:00-10:00
Excellencies,

Esteemed colleagues,

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of UN ESCAP,

Ms. Valerie Cliff, Deputy Regional Director of the Regional Bureau of Asia and the Pacific of UNDP,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to join you today.

I thank UN ESCAP for hosting us.

This is our first regional consultation for the mid-term review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Like in everything else, partnership is key and I wish to thank you for the excellent partnership and collaboration we enjoy with you, UNESCAP and UNECE, in organizing this meeting.

The Regional Commissions are key partners in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the regions.

At the core is national ownership and I sincerely thank the representatives from the landlocked and transit developing countries.

I also must thank development partners, the UN system organizations and other international, regional and sub-regional organizations for participating in this meeting.

I am very encouraged to see this great participation and interest and my motto would be "let's do it together".

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago, the Vienna Programme of Action was adopted. An ACTION plan giving us a comprehensive development framework to address and importantly act on the challenges of the landlocked developing countries.

The plan is also an advocacy tool and thanks to the tireless efforts of the members of the group themselves, the LLDC issues have been firmly entrenched on the international agenda.

Since then, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. The key goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to leave no one behind. This must include LLDCs.

Many LLDCs however remain at the bottom of the development ladder - the message is simple: more efforts, more ACTION is needed.

I see the glass half full. Progress has been made since the adoption of the Vienna Programme in 2014.

Some progress to make the SDGs reality has been made but that progress is slow, too slow.
Real GDP growth for LLDCs declined to 3% in 2016, its lowest level since 1998. It recovered to 4.5% in 2017 but is expected to stay stagnant around this level by 2020.

Poverty levels in LLDCs have generally declined, but are still higher than world average. Moderate or severe food insecurity is prevalent.

Progress has been made on health-related SDGs and indicators related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities remains low, well below world averages, despite steady improvements.

The high vulnerability of LLDCs to the negative impacts of climate change, especially drought, desertification and land degradation, is of serious concern.

Of course, situations vary widely from country to country.

Let’s now take a look at global level action.

To date, 24 out of 26 LLDCs that are WTO Members have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. In short, all but one LLDC in the Euro-Asia region that are WTO members have done so.

This is very encouraging. Why? Trade is at the core of transformation of the LLDCs and OHRLLS has tirelessly advocated for the ratification of the Agreement by the LLDCs and transit countries in order to improve trade facilitation.

BUT and there always is a but, we now must move to the next level.

The actual implementation of the Agreement by LLDCs is still lagging. More needs to be done to build the capacity of the LLDCs to implement and to draw benefit from agreements signed.

While the trade area has made progress in terms of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, it is the ratification of other relevant international conventions by both LLDCs and the transit countries that has been relatively low over the review period.

To illustrate the challenge: in terms of international trade, the LLDCs continue to account for less than 1% of global merchandise trade.

Exports remains concentrated around a few commodities, with low value addition and low technology content. This is troubling but above all it is cause for ACTION.

We must work to reduce the high trade costs. Overcoming this obstacle remains fundamental to integrating LLDCs into global trade.

Signs are there that this is possible. LLDCs have become more active participants in regional trade agreements, in particular in this region.

Initiatives such as the Belt and Road programme bear the prospect for LLDCs to access and integrate into regional and global networks.
But it is not just all about access, it also is about economic diversification and progress in the priority area on structural economic transformation is too slow.

We must do more to support governments in the shift of productive resources towards higher value added and high-productivity sectors and activities.

This is complex, as requirements range from infrastructure, to technology and skills to market access - a truly complex undertaking if there is one, may I say!

The needs that have to be met to achieve economic diversification cannot be addressed through domestic resources alone. The international community, from public to private actors, from international organizations to multilateral and regional development banks and other financial institutions, must rally as partners and support the development efforts of LLDCs.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

As I said earlier, and this is generally my approach to challenges, the glass is half full.

It now is very important that we set our sights as partners on the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action. We must be ambitious in our measures to support LLDCs to further address the challenges of landlockedness.

The United Nations General Assembly decided in 2017, and reaffirmed in 2018, to hold the High-Level Comprehensive Mid-term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action for two days in December 2019 in New York. The review will be chaired by the President of the General Assembly.

The purpose is straightforward: assess the progress made in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

This means that we must be able to measure, to identify achievements, obstacles and constraints. We then must look at actions that worked, actions that did not work and initiatives needed to close gaps and accelerate implementation of the Programme.

OHRLLS was mandated to co-ordinate the Midterm Review.

To me, focused, truly participatory consultations with all partners and relevant organizations always mindful of country ownership will be key to preparing a draft outline of the outcome document to facilitate the intergovernmental consultations.

That is why this Euro-Asian regional review meeting is so critical. We are gathering crucial inputs relating to the regional perspectives of the development needs of the LLDCs to feed into the outcome document of the global midterm review.

The President of the General Assembly also appointed the Permanent Representatives of Bhutan and Austria to the UN in New York as co-facilitators for the midterm review.

Thank you esteemed co-facilitators to have made the time to be here with us!

It is also very important that the members of the Bureau of the LLDC Group in New York from this region are with us, the esteemed Ambassadors of Mongolia and Lao PDR.
OHRLLS also collaborates and partners with UN ECA for the African regional review, which will take place next month in Morocco. We work with UN ECLAC and the Government of Paraguay on the organization of the Latin America regional review to be held in Paraguay in June.

National ownership and participation are key and so far we received national reports on the implementation of the VPoA from 12 LLDCs, including 7 from the Euro-Asian region.

I appeal to the remaining countries to submit their national reports soonest. These reports are a significant input to the global preparations.

As part of the preparatory process, the UN is also organizing thematic events on different issues that are of importance to LLDCs.

A Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport took place in Kazakhstan and kicked off the preparations; we held an Inaugural Conference of the International Think Tank for LLDCs; a number of LLDC specific side events took place during major global fora focused on energy, aviation, foreign direct investment, climate change; and workshops on transit and border cooperation.

UNESCAP, UNECE,UNCTAD, the International Think Tank for LLDCs and other organizations have also organized LLDC focused pre-conference events.

Indeed, we have all of us put great emphasis on a maximum of consultations and exchange.

In collaboration with partners, we are also planning to organize additional pre-conference thematic events during this year. The topics will include trade facilitation; ICT connectivity; science, technology and innovation for structural transformation; and trade and transport corridors.

OHRLLS also plans to organize a dedicated retreat in New York bringing together LLDCs, transit countries, development partners and international organizations to consult on the outcome of the Midterm Review.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The preparatory process offers us a timely opportunity to take stock of progress made so far in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Today, we have the opportunity to listen to detailed accounts on the experiences in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action in this region.

We will look at what worked well and where gaps are and persist. We will deliberate on what are key actions for accelerating progress.

This is your chance, this is our chance to take stock, to get heard and to focus on the actions to take during the remaining five years of implementation of VPoA.

None of us will be able to go it alone and so in closing I wish to underscore again the importance of strengthening partnerships. If well executed, it is our partnerships which can make significant contributions to supporting the LLDCs so that we do not leave the LLDCs and their peoples behind.

I look forward to our dialogue and thank you for your kind attention.