Closing Statement by

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at the Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024 in the Africa Region

19 March 2019

Marrakech, Morocco
• H.E. Mr. Eric Yemdaogo Tiare Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations and Chair of this Meeting
• H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN, New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action
• H.E. Ms. Doma Tshering, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action
• Mr. Stephen Karingi, Director, Regional Integration and Trade Division, UNECA

• Excellencies
• Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen

At the outset, please allow me to extended my heartfelt condolences to the families and the people of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe for the loss of lives due to Cyclone Idai that swept through their countries this past weekend. I wish those that were injured speedy recovery.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen
It gives me great pleasure to address this Closing Session of the Africa regional review meeting of the Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries.

Allow me first to convey my deep appreciation to the Government of Morocco and the people of the Kingdom of Morocco for hosting us here in the beautiful setting in Marrakesh.

I would like to thank the Chair, Ambassador Eric Yemdaogo Tiare of Burkina Faso and the Bureau of this meeting for so efficiently and capably steering this meeting leading to a very successful outcome.

I wish to thank all of you for participating and for your dedication and active participation and contribution to the success of this meeting. It has been excellent to hear LLDCs, transit countries and development partners discussing together the progress made and the challenges remaining in implementing the VPoA.

Congratulations on the outcome of this meeting. The adopted outcome document raises important areas that are crucial for accelerating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region.
The Africa regional assessment report, the outcome document and the presentations and discussions of this meeting clearly outlined both the trends and the challenges that the region faces in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

There was a convergence of opinion that progress and notable achievements have been made on most of the priority areas in this region.

The plans to improve the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by African LLDCs and transit countries will bring improvements in shortening the transit time, reducing trade costs.

The establishment of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area shows deepening of regional integration and cooperation. The Single Africa Air Transport Market signed in January 2018 aims to open up the African skies and encourages development. In the discussions I also heard many of you referring to the efforts that your countries are making in reaching bi-lateral and regional agreements showing your pursuit for greater cooperation in areas that are of relevance to the Vienna Programme of Action. And I take note of the advice that was provided by Ambassador of Austria regarding Austria’s experience of promoting regional cooperation.
The progress and notable achievements that have been made during the review period to build and upgrade transport, energy and ICT infrastructure are commendable. In particular, the various projects that were inaugurated and commissioned during the review period to improve connectivity of the LLDCs. Many examples were mention such as the construction of the Kazungula Bridge, upgrading of many airports, sea ports and railways.

On trade facilitation we heard that progress is being made including the establishment of one-stop border posts, single windows, information portals and others.

We need to maintain and enhance these positive trends.

Many areas where progress was low were identified. For example, progress towards structural economic transformation and export diversification in most LLDCs was slow and needed concerted efforts to accelerate progress. I also heard that more efforts are needed to promote intra-Africa trade.

You also highlighted the challenges that you are facing including: limited financing for infrastructure development and maintenance; limited technical and institutional capacity; lack of adequate data to plan, monitor, and review on the
progress. The effects of climate change were also mentioned as having a huge impact on the economies of the LLDCs.

As we move forward toward the Midterm review of the VPoA we need to keep strong emphasis on partnerships by all stakeholders including LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, the United Nations and other international and regional organizations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I once again thank the bureau for facilitating the deliberations of this meeting.

I wish to thank the co-facilitators, Austria and Bhutan and trust that you will take forward the outcome of this meeting into the negotiations of the outcome of the MTR. I also thank the global bureau of the LLDCs and take note with appreciation of the presence of Ambassadors of Burkina Faso and Burundi in this meeting.

I also wish to thank development partners that are present, in particular, Japan, Norway and Poland for your active participation and contribution.

A very special thanks goes to UNECA for co-organizing the meeting, and for all the important work that you do in this region.
I also thank the representatives of the UN-system organizations as well as representatives of other international and regional organizations for your participation and important contributions to the deliberations of this meeting.

Last but not least, I wish to thank and express my gratitude to the interpreters for the good work and for making it possible for us to have fruitful deliberations.

Finally, as indicated by the Under-Secretary-General at the opening, this meeting is the second one of the regional review meetings of the comprehensive midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action after the one for the Euro-Asia region that was held last month in Bangkok Thailand. This outcome inputs into the preparatory process in New York and into the Midterm Review that will be held in December this year. This outcome will also feed into the upcoming 52nd session of the ECA Commission.

We are now looking forward to the Latin America regional review that will be held in Asuncion, Paraguay in June.

I look forward to continue collaborating closely with all of you in this preparatory process leading to MTR in December 2019. I assure you of UN-OHRLLS support to your endeavors.