Opening Remarks

The Gvt of Morocco
Distinguished Delegates;
Colleagues of the United Nations;
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocol observed

I am pleased to be here this morning representing the Executive Secretary of ECA at this very important Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Program of Action (VPoA) for LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024 in the Africa Region. I bring you warm greetings from our ES, who wanted to be here but due to unforeseeable circumstances she could not make it.

Let me at the outset thank the Government of Morocco for their hospitality, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and Government of China for collaborating with ECA on this important initiative. In the same note, allow me to thank the all distinguished delegates present for their presence and we look forward to your substantive contributions to this coming 2 days.

Africa is home to half of the 32 landlocked developing countries found globally. Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face special trade and development challenges, arising from their lack of territorial access to the sea and geographical remoteness from international markets. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the important role of transport connectivity and underscores the importance of international trade as a means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
A distinctive feature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is its emphasis on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable and leaving “no one behind” and its recognition that the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) deserve special attention. In the same manner, the Government of China’s Belt and Road Initiative promotes transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs by strengthening the capacity of LLDCs in designing and implementing policies and providing solutions that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs.

Agenda 2063; a long-term continental framework for development dubbed “the Africa We Want”, aims at achieving an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. Agenda 2063 has 7 aspirations and aspiration 2 provides details on how the continent will enhance its trade potential. It notes that Africa shall be a continent where the free movement of people, capital, goods and services will result in significant increases in trade and investments amongst African countries rising to unprecedented levels, and strengthen Africa’s place in global trade.

This midterm review provides us with an opportunity to analyse the status of implementation of all aspects of the VPoA and look into identifying best practices and lessons learnt as well as obstacles and constraints encountered and actions needed to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA. Results emanating from the Mid-Term Review Report so far points to the fact that African LLDCs are making efforts and progress towards the implementation of the VPoA but the progress is slow to achieve the objectives of the VPoA by 2024 and the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. Therefore, acceleration of efforts need to be channelled towards addressing the special challenges associated with landlockedness and ensure that they are not left behind.

With regard to regional implementation, the VPoA has mostly been mainstreamed into the Commission’s programme of work. The Commission though its various divisions carries out relevant activities to address LLDCs constraints in a holistic manner to ensure achievement of the VPoA targets.
For instance, the Regional Integration and Trade Division facilitated the establishment of Africa Corridor Management Association (ACMA) whose objectives as a coordinating body for African Corridors Management Institutes (CMIs) is to provide strategic direction with respect to corridor development initiatives and activities is an important initiative for the LLDCs. Through ACMA, CMIs would build on successful lessons and practices to identify the necessary conditions that will be replicated towards achieving the goals for promoting value chain, trade facilitation and to foster market integration in the continent.

At the national level, the Commission mandate of generating ideas for action provides support on policymaking, programme implementation and stakeholder coordination. At the sub regional and regional levels, support is provided on analytical work, networking, knowledge-sharing, transit cooperation and regional integration. For instance, with the historic launch of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in March 2018, Rwanda to which ECA was very much instrumental in design of the framework, provides for product diversification and it enables smaller African producers to realize economies of scale.

Landlocked countries tend to be further disadvantaged in terms of their industrialization process because of the higher costs of freight and unpredictable transit times. This hampers their integration into regional and global value chains and de-links such economies from regional and world markets, as modern manufacturing relies on the import and export of components through regional and global value chains. Because of this sensitivity to the ease with which they can access port facilities in neighbouring coastal countries, the AfCFTA provides particular benefits: in addition to reducing tariffs, it includes provisions on trade facilitation, transit and customs cooperation. These benefits have been well recognized, as all African LLDCs, with the exception of Burundi, signed at least the Kigali Declaration. 12 LLDCs signed the consolidated AfCFTA agreement. 11 also signed the protocol for free movement of persons.
African industrialization agenda can be further enhanced by the ratification and implementation of the WTO-Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) as this creates opportunity to improve commerce and multilateral trade system as a whole. The continent is indeed endowed with enormous resources. There is the need to hasten industrialization to enable African countries to benefit fully from the resources available to them. This process of industrialization must be supported by the implementation of effective trade facilitation measures to transform the economies of the continent and create jobs for growing, working youth and ultimately ensure an accelerated socio-economic growth of our continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The AfCFTA can serve an effective instrument for regional integration, promotion of industrial development and economic diversification and the enhancement of the participation of the member states in regional and global trade more so for the LLDCs. With the initial launch of another flagship initiative for Agenda 2063 in January 2018, the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) which liberalises and unifies the African skies and was ratified by 25 countries of the African Union (AU) facilitates the attainment of the objectives of the Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade and the AfCFTA. Therefore, vigorously pursuing the objectives of the AfCFTA which are aimed at achieving a comprehensive and mutually beneficial trade agreement among member states of the African Union (AU) will integrate LLDCs into the regional and global value chains.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I wish to state that there are challenges in all endeavours, so do not feel intimidated. With commitment and concerted efforts from all stakeholders and institutions: nationally, continental and globally, these challenges can and shall be overcome. This is the optimism for success in the new approach to integration in Africa.
Regional initiatives characterized by direct involvement of the private sector in the formulation and implementation of a conducive policy environment, peer reviews from enterprising stakeholders setting the pace for integration, and innovative solutions should define the new approaches that would enable us derive maximum benefits from integration as well as attaining the targets of VPoA and indeed Agenda 2063 and 2030.

I wish all of us a fruitful and productive Meeting

I thank you for your attention