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Statement

for

**Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu
High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General**

**Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small
Island Developing States**

**Briefing Session to Member States on the Comprehensive Midterm Review
of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs**

**20 November 2019
Conference Room E, United Nations Secretariat Building**

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to our briefing session on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries.

The review takes place in just a couple weeks on 5 and 6 December 2019.

I sincerely thank all of you for making the time to attend this important briefing.

I look forward to your continued support. We need your support for the successful organization of the High-level Meeting.

Allow me first to introduce our panel for today.

Joining us are,

His Excellency, Mr. Julio César Arriola, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Paraguay the Chair of the LLDC Group;

Mr. Bruno Rios, Senior Advisor, Office of the President of the General Assembly; and

Ms. Claudia Gross, Intergovernmental Affairs Officer, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all know that the Landlocked developing countries are one of the most vulnerable groups of countries.

Key factors are their geographical location, inadequate transport and transit infrastructure and cumbersome border crossing procedures.

LLDCs to export or import pay, on average, almost twice what coastal countries pay to export and import.

It would be an understatement to say that this severely limits their trade potential which is so key to their ability to achieve sustainable development.

But these are not the only challenges.

LLDCs are driven by high commodity-dependency, exhibit low productive capacities and are in a way first in line when it comes to the impacts of climate change. They are highly vulnerable to desertification, land degradation, and flooding just to cite a few of the impacts.

Five years ago, the international community gathered in Vienna to adopt the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries. This was so done recognizing that a special set of action was urgently needed.

The action programme built on the Almaty Programme of Action adopted in 2003.

The VPoA is a comprehensive 10-year development plan.

At the core of the plan is the agreement that we must address the special needs of the LLDCs. The plan calls for renewed and strengthened partnerships between landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners.

- The plan focuses on six priority action areas:
- Fundamental Transit Policy Issues,
- Infrastructure development and maintenance,
- International Trade and Trade Facilitation,
- Regional Integration,
- Structural Economic Transformation, and
- Means of Implementation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We find ourselves at the midpoint of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The General Assembly in resolutions 72/232 and 73/243 decided to hold a Comprehensive Midterm Review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The review is to be chaired by the President of the Assembly.

The Midterm Review is a critically important and timely opportunity for the landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners to assess both progress made and what we now must do looking forward.

It is a stock-taking of achievements, best practices and those areas where we need improvements.

Based on the assessment, the Midterm Review will identify ways to accelerate implementation in the remaining 5 years.

It is our shared opportunity to re-energize commitment by the international community to address the challenges of the LLDCs.

It is our shared opportunity to ensure we do not leave the LLDCs and their peoples behind.

The Midterm Review is convened by the UN under the auspices of the PGA with attendance by all UN Member States and other stakeholders.

The parallel is the recently held Midterm Review of the SAMOA Pathway that was held during the high-level week of the General Assembly in September.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The preparations for the Midterm Review meeting are in their final stage.

Since last year, OHRLLS has coordinated the preparatory process. This involved a number of activities.

The process included national level reviews by LLDCs.

As of today, a large majority of LLDCs submitted their national reports on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Regional review meetings were organized earlier this year for Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Meetings were convened in Bangkok, Thailand for the Asia/Europe region; for Africa, in Marrakech, Morocco; and Latin America, in Santiago, Chile.

All regional meetings adopted very useful forward-looking outcomes.

A retreat at Ambassadorial level was also held to discuss an assessment of the progress and key priorities for the remaining period of implementing the VPoA.

Together with UN agencies, international institutions and some member states, a total of 22 pre-conference events were organized.

They addressed topics relevant to landlocked developing countries to facilitate dialogue and outreach discussions on challenges and possible priorities.

The topics ranged from transport infrastructure development; to Sustainable Energy; Aid for Trade; Science, Technology and Innovation; structural economic transformation; trade; transit Cooperation and Trade Facilitation; Corridor Development and Management; Climate change; ICT and digitalization and more!

You can see we tried to be very inclusive and comprehensive!

All pre-conference events, national reports and outcomes of the regional meetings provide vital elements for the draft outcome document of the midterm review.

With regard to intergovernmental consultations, the Ambassadors of Bhutan and Austria facilitated the intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document.

The outcome document, in the form of a High-Level Political Declaration, has now been consensually agreed by the Member States and will be adopted during the midterm review.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

OHRLLS works closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, which is leading the organization of the midterm review itself, as well as other departments to finalize the programme of the midterm review.

I highlight that on 5 December - our first day of the Midterm Review - we have a high-level opening session by the President of the General Assembly H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande and H.E. Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres.

This will be followed by consideration for adoption of the Political Declaration and a plenary session.

On 6 December, we have a High-level panel on challenges and opportunities for the VPoA and its interlinkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We also have an Interactive Panel on promoting trade, trade facilitation and structural economic transformation in Landlocked Developing Countries;

and we have an Interactive Panel on regional integration and infrastructure connectivity.

Mr. Bruno Rios from the PGA's Office will provide you with more details on the programme of the Midterm Review.

There will also be a number of side events. These have been organized by the Inter Agency Consultative Group and they focus on relevant key priorities of landlocked developing countries. A list of the side events has been circulated. The aim of the side events is to launch and discuss concrete deliverables, solutions and initiatives in support of LLDCs' long-term sustainable development.

OHRLLS and the PGA's Office have dedicated webpages on the Midterm Review for your additional information.

In concluding, allow me to once more urge all UN Member States to participate in the Midterm Review at the highest level possible.

Please do finalize your delegations as soon as possible! And as pedestrian as it might sound but please do get the necessary visas...

I thank the Governments of Austria, The People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation for their contribution made towards supporting participation of LLDC delegates from the capitals.

I call for your continued cooperation and support including contribution to the Trust Fund for the implementation and follow-up of the outcome of the Midterm Review.

It is my sincere hope that this Midterm Review produces effective global partnerships.

Partnerships that help the peoples of the LLDCs on their road to greater integration in the global trading systems and achieve an inclusive and sustainable development for all as envisaged by Agenda 2030.