Statement by
H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan
(New York, 5 December 2019)

Mr. President,
Madam Under-Secretary-General,
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin with expressing our appreciation to Paraguay as the Chair, and High Representative Madame Utoikamanu with her colleagues at OHRLLS, for their committed efforts to prepare this Review, and to the delegations of Austria and Bhutan for their able leadership in facilitating the Political Declaration adopted earlier today.

It is my great honour to represent Kazakhstan at this very important and vital midterm review. My country, as the world’s largest landlocked country, has been at the forefront to help LLDCs to transcend their geographical disadvantages. We had thus convened the first 2003 UN Conference of LLDCs in Almaty, which galvanized international solidarity to assist LLDCs. Subsequently, we hosted the Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport in Astana in 2018 to launch the preparatory process of this Midterm Review.

Dear colleagues,

The period since the adoption of the VPoA has been a period of opportunities and challenges for the LLDCs. Over the past five years, significant progress has been made by LLDCs in several priority areas specified by the VPoA. Let me share our brief assessment of achievements and challenges in VPoA’s priority areas (transit policy, infrastructure development, international trade and trade facilitation, regional integration, structural economic transformation, means of realization).

Regarding the first priority of VPoA, which is about fundamental transit policy issues, I’m pleased to note the large number of new accessions and ratifications of international agreements related to transit transport, including WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), UNECE TIR Convention and the launch of the World Customs Organization’s transit guidelines. Over the review period, Kazakhstan became a full member of the WTO, ratified the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports and actively negotiated sub-regional and multilateral transit
and transport facilitation arrangements under Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Eurasian Economic Union.

LLDCs have made significant progress on the second priority area on **Connectivity and Transport Infrastructure Development**, including rail, road, air, waterways and energy pipelines. Enhancing transport infrastructure has a multiplier effect for our growing economy, giving impetus to the trade flows of the revived Silk Road and promoting the economic advancement of the region.

Kazakhstan aims to further improve our transit and transportation potential and develop the Eurasian multimodal transit-transport hub. Thus, we are implementing our national infrastructure programme “Nurly Zhol” to strengthen Eurasian integration and ensure our country’s key role in China’s Belt and Road Initiative. As part of this programme we have built more than 2,500 km of railroad, reconstructed 12,000 km of highways, opened “Western Europe–Western China” automobile transit corridor and Khorgos-Gate Way dry port on the border with China. In terms of development of Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor Aktau port on Caspian Sea was modernized to reduce the cargo handling process from 10 to 4 hours. Today, Kazakhstan’s 11 international transit corridors – five railway and six automobile – allow to transport goods from Europe to Asia much faster than by sea and much cheaper than by air transportation.

In addition, our eleven airports recently adopted an open skies regime which allows more foreign carriers and more flights to operate in Kazakhstan.

LLDCs have achieved significant progress in **Enhancing digital and energy connectivity**, which is VPoA’s another priority that greatly complements transport connectivity.

New technologies and increased access to ICT, including through PPPs is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan. My country is implementing a national programme called “Digital Kazakhstan” to improve nation’s economy and quality of live through the progressive development of the digital ecosystem.

**International trade and trade facilitation** play a crucial role in improving LLDCs global competitiveness. The introduction of ICT solutions to trade transactions have opened up new opportunities for the LLDCs.

Using these opportunities, Kazakhstan jointly with UNCTAD, have launched an automated customs administration programme, called “ASTANA-1”, and now are developing a “Single Window” mechanism for foreign trade operations. Kazakhstan’s efforts in trade facilitation were praised by the World Bank, which ranked our country 25th globally in its recent Doing Business rating.

The other priority area of **Structural Economic Transformation**, is crucial to reduce the vulnerabilities of the LLDCs, creating jobs, building local productive capacity, and reducing poverty and inequality.

Kazakhstan promotes structural economic transformation through sustainable industries, modernized business procedures and increased support to SMEs. Recently
over 1,200 new industrial enterprises were established and 24 new manufacturing sectors have emerged with breakthrough technologies. We are also working on further increasing FDI inflow to the country, which already makes up about a third of all direct investments to the LLDCs.

Despite all the efforts made, our countries still experience difficulties in diversifying exports structures and enhancing trade capacities. The LLDC’s share of exports in global trade is still less than one percent, and as much as one third of our population still lives in poverty. Poor trade performance was partially affected by the uncertainty in oil and other commodity markets, technological growth, the slowdown of the global economy, and an unanticipated increase in protectionist measures, economic sanctions and geopolitical tensions.

We realize that to succeed, in the remaining years of VPoA’s implementation, the LLDCs need to concentrate on several issues. We, together with the transit countries and international institutions, should continue our collective work on developing and upgrading international transport and transit corridors. Our countries need to ensure the full and effective implementation of already signed agreements; continue improving and harmonizing our customs regulations; streamlining border crossing procedures by introducing paperless trade and single window environment. We also need to facilitate integration of our medium and small sized enterprises into the regional and global markets and reduce the dependence on raw products. With regard to energy connectivity, there is a need to increase the efficiency of grid and transmission systems and the level of renewable energy consumption. In terms of ICT, we need to continue making broadband more affordable and advance new technological drivers, such as 5G, IOT, cloud computing, AI, big data, which will be the critical engines for digital transformation in the future. We also should take advantage of learning from each other’s experiences, and from collection and analysis of disaggregated data to monitor and review the progress made. The International Think Tank for LLDCs will be instrumental in strengthening the analytical capacities of our countries.

Many LLDCs face capacity constraints and lack adequate domestic financial resources to implement the VPoA. We, therefore, need the mobilization of reliable long-term resources through South-South, North-South and Triangular Cooperation. We need to take advantage of new infrastructure development funds and initiatives, such as $40 billion New Silk Road Fund, the Belt and Road Initiative, the World Bank-led Global Infrastructure Forum, Asian Infrastructure Development Bank ADB’s regional initiatives. In addition to ODA, Aid for Trade, FDI and remittances are also important sources for mobilization.

In this regard, I would like to underline the proposal of Kazakhstan to establish a UN Regional Centre for SDGs with the mandate to assist landlocked developing
countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan, in such areas as investments, support to small and medium enterprises, developing our transit and export potential.

Dear colleagues,

Kazakhstan, as the Global Chair of the LLDCs for 2020-2021, envisages building close cooperation with the UN system and other relevant organizations, financial institutes, developed partners, transit countries and private sector to forge coherence in achieving the goals of the VPoA, which is integral to the Agenda 2030, the Addis-Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and other global processes.

As a firm supporter of the multilateral trading system, Kazakhstan is privileged to host the next 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in Kazakhstan in our capital Nur-Sultan in June 2020. I would like to thank the LLDCs for the unanimous support extended by them for our bid. We will try to live up to your expectations. At the same time, we urge all of you to avail of this conference to deliberate on the critical issues encountered by the LLDCs and the ways to overcome them. In addition, we are planning to host a special ministerial meeting of LLDCs in the margins of this Conference so that we can carry forward even further our determined resolve.

We also intend to initiate preparations for the Almaty +20 Review which will coincide with the 10-year review of the VPoA.

Kazakhstan will coordinate the collective action of LLDCs, in close cooperation with the groups of LDCs and SIDS, to combine each of their unique synergies to make a strong bargaining power. The goal is to constitute ourselves into a strong negotiating bloc in relevant fora for our voices to be heard loud and clear. Simultaneously, we will also address challenges faced by each of us individually. As Chair, Kazakhstan will embrace this LLDCs Group as a family so that we take our strides together.

A determined drive and resolute efforts will see a greater momentum towards our aspirations for the VPoA and the Decade of Action declared this September. Only then will our peoples have the peace, security, economic stability and the prosperity they deserve.

I thank you.