Statement by
Ambassador Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent
Representative of Republic of Rwanda to the United Nations

UNHQ, New York

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Mr. President,

1. This high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024 comes at an important time- Five years into the implementation of the Programme of Action, and at the cusp of entering into a decade of action and delivery for the SDGs.

2. The assessment of progress, challenges, and opportunities for LLDCs will be vital in informing Member States’ development priorities during this decade of action for the SDGs.

3. In this context, I would like to reflect on few points of interest to my country.

Mr. President,

4. The first point to make is that being landlocked does not equate to perpetual poverty. In the words of my President His Excellency Paul Kagame, ‘geography should not be seen as an excuse for underdevelopment’.

5. For Rwanda at least, we chose to invest in existing opportunities rather than blame our geographical disposition- and the results have been encouraging. In terms of social and economic development, we have tripled our GDP between 2000-2018. In doing so, Rwanda achieved all but one Millennium Development Goals,
registering historic achievements in reducing maternal and child mortality, and reducing inequality levels.

6. All this was enabled by visionary political leadership and innovative policies. *It is important to stress that there is no substitute for responsible political leadership.*

Mr. President,

7. *My second point is to highlight the importance of regional integration and infrastructure connectivity for LLDCs.* Indeed, regional integration has been identified as one of the core measures in relation to unlocking Africa’s potential towards economic growth and development.

8. For the EAC region, spatial distribution and diverse endowments in the region, has made it prudent to develop multi-country infrastructure to facilitate cross border movement of people, goods and services which is championed at the highest political level by the EAC Heads of State.

9. Progress so far is encouraging, for example:

   1) The East African Road Network Project, comprising of a pool of multinational road projects at least a stretch in every Partner State, to link sea touching with land locked Partner States, is progressing well.

   2) The operationalization of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) is also yielding good results. For example, few
days ago, the Rwanda-DR Congo OSBP border of La Corniche started operating. These play a vital role in enhancing cross border trade and movement of persons within the EAC region but more so for land locked members.

3) A number of joint Railway Projects are currently underway in the EAC region; these include the $5 Billion Dar es Salaam-Isaka-Kigali SGR between Rwanda and Tanzania along the Central Corridor whose studies are all completed, now in Financing/Resource mobilization phase.

4) The Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) is also being advanced through finalizing regional regulations to ensure the liberalization of air transport services.

5) The EAC continues to implement a number of regional Energy projects for oil pipelines, power generation and interconnection projects. These include, the Rusumo 81MW Hydro power project between Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, The Kagitumba/Mirama Shango and Birembo hydro, among many others. These help in industrializing our region, domestic purposes and also for socio-economic transformation

Mr. President,
10. The effective implementation of the Vienna POA will require us to tackle persisted challenges including:
   1) Financial constraints in implementing the required large infrastructure projects which are capital intensive;
   2) Addressing geopolitical uncertainties that threaten to stall progress on regional initiatives;
   3) Coordination and prioritization of regional projects in a manner that satisfies member states interests in an acceptable manner.

11. The role of the United Nations will be vital to ensuring the Vienna POA is successfully achieved. In supporting Member States, bodies such as UNCTAD play an important role in capacity building, technical support, and financing for key projects in LLDCs.

12. We look forward to a fruitful engagement with Member States and partners during these two days as we review the Vienna POA, and we reiterate our support and commitment to the implementation of the POA.

I thank you for your kind attention