South Africa aligns itself with the statements delivered by the State of Palestine on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and Paraguay as Chair of the LLDC Group.

We wish to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this important Midterm Review which is a critically important and timely opportunity for the landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners to assess progress made, identify obstacles and constraints, emerging challenges and opportunities, as well as finding ways to further accelerate its implementation in the remaining five years. It is also an opportunity to re-energize commitments by the international community to address the challenges of the LLDCs.

Following the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action in 2014, efforts have been made towards its effective implementation. Notwithstanding these efforts, progress has fallen short of achieving the desired objectives and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report of the Secretary General indicated that more needs to
be done for LLDCs to achieve the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action and the SDGs.

Over the past five years, achievement in implementation of the priorities of the VPoA has been mixed. Progress has been made in areas such as ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by LLDCs and transit countries, deepening of regional integration and cooperation, improvements in road and rail corridor performance and growth in dry ports.

In other areas there has been limited progress. One third of the LLDCs’ population is still living in poverty and the LLDCs continue to account for less than one percent of the global trade. There has been limited progress on structural economic transformation, as demonstrated by the relatively low value-added contribution of the manufacturing sector in the LLDCs. Quality education, including skills training addressed to youth would be one of the key areas to address in order to overcome those challenges.

Despite the continued efforts to expand and upgrade the transport infrastructure, inadequate quality and deficiencies in the physical infrastructure remain. Access to electricity in the LLDCs has increased but remains below the world average. In addition, costs of ICT services in the LLDCs remain high. Whilst most LLDCs have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, their implementation of the Agreement lags behind. Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows continue to be concentrated in a few LLDCs and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows have declined. It is important to address the means of implementation regarding the needs of the LLDCs.

In addition, landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) are one of the most vulnerable groups of countries that continue to face special challenges due to their lack of direct access to the sea, geographical remoteness, and isolation from world markets.

In Africa, in particular, which has the largest number of LLDCs, these challenges are exacerbated by poor infrastructure, cumbersome border-crossing procedures, and
structural deficiencies, as well as limited access to global markets which is key for economic growth.

With this in mind, the African Union (AU) has taken steps to counter these persistent setbacks. Concerted efforts will be made to speed up the operationalization of the Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) in support of intra-Africa trade. The strengthening of regional and continental integration will obviate the dependence on external trade for the predominantly commodity-driven countries. The more Africa integrates through regional and continental trade and development communities, the more landlocked countries' isolation will be broken down. Open borders will create a free-flowing movement of people and goods, as well as improve interconnectivity.

In addition, Agenda 2063, the African Union (AU's) blueprint for Africa's growth and development, is fully aligned to support these initiatives. With Africa having the most LLDCs (16/32), this is a priority for the Continent.

Infrastructure development is crucial for landlocked developing countries, specifically the development and maintenance of transit transport infrastructure, information and communications technology, and energy infrastructure. To this end, investment in the Programme for Infrastructure in Africa (PIDA) is encouraged in supporting this. South Africa, as a transit country, plays an important role in facilitating regional integration through the SADC Protocol on Trade by reducing customs duties and other barriers to trade amongst SADC Member States.

A further impediment is the geographic location of many LLDCs which are located in extreme dry and arid regions making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, desertification and land degradation. This further compounds the challenges and continues to undermine efforts to achieve sustainable development

Excellences, distinguished delegates,
We all agree that these challenges are not insurmountable and that we need to redouble our efforts if the fundamental principle of the 2030 Agenda of "leaving no one behind" is to be fulfilled. The VPoA is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its full implementation is fundamental to attaining the SDGs in LLDCs.

The specific challenges faced by LLDCs, particularly regarding disaster risk reduction, poverty eradication and zero hunger must be prioritized to ensure that no one is left behind in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

It is encouraging that we have taken the commitment in the Political Declaration to work together to address the special needs of the LLDCs and must continue to call for renewed and strengthened partnerships between landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners. It is our shared responsibility to ensure we do not leave the LLDCs and their peoples behind.

We commend the co-facilitators, Austria and Bhutan for their tireless efforts in driving this agenda and in ensuring the successful outcome contained in the Political Declaration.

We reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, and encourage the United Nations System and all other actors to implement the actions that have been agreed upon in the VPoA.

In working together, we can realize our collective vision for the socioeconomic transformation of LLDCs.

I THANK YOU.