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**UN-OHRLLS**

**Welcome remarks (video message)**

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**High Representative**

**and**

**Under-Secretary- General**

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

**Regional Dialogue: Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region  
and beyond in the era of COVID-19**

**29 September 2020**

Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you all to our regional dialogue on Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region and beyond in the era of COVID-19.

The aim of our meeting is very important.

It is to facilitate a discussion on this topic amongst the countries of this region that includes seven Landlocked Developing Countries.

We are still in the midst of a pandemic teaching us over and over that it knows no borders. We barely begin to get a grasp on its far-reaching and complex social, economic institutional and political impacts.

We already know how hard the transport sector has been hit.

Passenger and freight transport have slumped and so have the millions and millions of jobs associated with the sector.

Tourism has all but come to a halt and revenue is a fraction of what it used to be.

Supply chains have been disrupted including those of the critical supply in medicines.

Merchandise trade has plummeted.

The LLDCs rely heavily on being able to transit goods through neighboring countries.

For LLDCs, transport connectivity is key in building inclusive and sustainable development and , thus, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The current situation is not just a major setback, it is a threat.

Prior to COVID- 19, we already knew that LLDCs face high transport costs, cumbersome border procedures and challenges in advancing sustainable transport solutions and closing missing transport links

Back in 2014, the international community responded to the needs of LLDCs through the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014 -2024.

The goals for transport are straightforward:

promotion of efficient and cost-effective access to and from the sea for LLDCs by all means of transport, on the basis of the freedom of transit.

development of enhanced transport infrastructure and increased trade facilitation.

In December 2019, the High-level Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action took place.

A strong call for action on targeted and accelerated measures by LLDCs, transit countries and development partners were issued so that in the remaining five action years the Vienna Programme goals could be reached.

The Political Declaration calls for greater efforts, and I add faster efforts to meet the goals of the Vienna Programme.

Even before COVID-19, the goals were at risk of not being met !

What is called for concerns first and foremost the effective implementation of all relevant agreements to improve transit;

Calls for the promotion of corridor development;

Calls for the development of regionally integrated, sustainable and climate resilient transport infrastructure;

Calls for enhanced trade facilitation; and

Calls for deepening regional integration.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis at the start of this year, the United Nations system has called for supply chains and transport networks for LLDCs to remain open and functional while ensuring their public health safety.

Transport and value chains are globally interconnected. So, an effective response requires coordination.

Regional connectivity of the LLDCs hinges on effective and efficient transit transport systems.

We must place at the core of efforts the enhancement of regional connectivity of LLDCs.

The overarching goal is to have sustainable, affordable and resilient transport systems capable of fostering health and safety of all.

We also ought to leverage the COVID-19 crisis to now leverage new technologies.

LLDCs and their neighbours stand to greatly gain from the enhanced use of digital tools and technologies that lower transport costs and border crossing times, but also address COVID-19-related border disruptions.

Think of electronic cargo tracking systems, electronic exchange of information, paperless solutions, use of mobile banking and payment systems and digital solutions for cross-border facilitation such as the e-TIR and e-CMR.

A further critical action pertains to harmonizing border procedures and interventions at the regional level in light of COVID-19. This would ensure transparency and enhanced information sharing to enable a continued smooth flow of goods and services.

We now must also look beyond immediate recovery measures and leverage much more systematically the transport sector as a driver of inclusive and sustainable growth in the post COVID-19 world.

Investment in resilient transport infrastructure should be a priority, as it has the potential to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19 and help LLDCs recover better.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Any crisis bears opportunity.

It is up to us to now seize the opportunity to scale up our actions and invest in innovative transport solutions.

Our response to the pandemic, our support to helping LLDCs recover ought to be focused on what is needed to lay the ground for a sustainable path for future progress.

Just last week the Annual Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries adopted a Ministerial Declaration that underscores enhanced coordination and solutions to the impacts of COVID-19 on transport connectivity and other sectors.

In turn, the General Assembly recently adopted an Omnibus Resolution on Comprehensive and Coordinated Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

It stresses the importance of facilitating transportation and logistical supply lines, as well as enhancing the effective implementation of relevant international conventions and multilateral instruments on transport and transit.

UN-OHRLLS will continue to advocate for enhanced transport connectivity of the LLDCs.

Over the past few months, we have coordinated the development of a Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the Vienna Programme that was adopted by the LLDC Ministers last week.

This Roadmap is a plan of action, it includes tangible activities and deliverables by the UN system and other international and regional organizations to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme.

Development of transport infrastructure and transit and trade facilitation are amongst the key action areas, with concrete projects in the region.  
Let me give you an example.

In collaboration with the Economic Commissions for Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and the other UN Regional Commissions, we are implementing a project that is supported by the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund.

The focus of the project is “Strengthening the capacity of LLDCs under the Belt and Road Initiative” to design and implement policies that promote inclusive, affordable and sustainable transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs. This will include regional training workshops for LLDC policy makers.

I hope the discussions today will be a useful input to the preparations of the LLDC ministerial conference on transport connectivity organized together with the Government of Turkmenistan as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Conference on Sustainable Transport.

Being a landlocked country as the word says means you are locked and you are reliant on global and regional collaboration. Countries cannot simply “go it alone”.

The pandemic impact has shown us over and over the critical importance of connectivity of all kinds.

Our concerted transport connectivity efforts must not just continue. They must be strengthened so that we do not further exclude the LLDCs from international trade at a critical time.

In closing, may I wish you productive deliberations on this vital issue.

Thank you.