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**Statement**

**by**

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Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my thanks to the Inland Transport Committee for inviting me to speak at this panel on intermodal freight transport and connectivity.

Transport is a key development enabler for all the dimensions of sustainable development. It is a true cross-cutting issue and many SDGs cannot be reached without transportation.

For the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), transport is key. LLDCs are amongst the world's most vulnerable countries. They face special challenges and needs due to their geographical position and isolation from world markets.

The LLDCs represent 480 million inhabitants, some 6% of world population. They occupy about 22% of the total world land area. Yet, they account for less than 1 per cent of global exports, and this share has been declining.

Due to the long distances to the sea, inadequate transit transport infrastructure, burdensome transit and border crossing procedures, LLDCs face transport costs that are more than twice that of the transit countries. High trade costs affect export competitiveness, access to imported goods, foreign direct investment and intensify the comparative disadvantages.

As a result of these challenges, the level of development of LLDCs is about 20% lower than it would be if they were not landlocked.

LLDCs do face challenges in connecting to the global markets. But there are also opportunities from connecting LLDC to the international economy and

value chains. It can be a win-win situation. Several LLDCs such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan play a key role in regional transit systems.

Being landlocked does not necessarily mean poverty and slow growth. Many landlocked countries enjoy rich natural endowments, such as fuels, minerals, metals, ores and agricultural raw materials that are high in demand.

For example, Turkmenistan is one of the top 10 countries with largest natural gas reserves. Approximately one fifth of the world's uranium reserves are located in Kazakhstan, and the country ranks in tenth place in iron ore reserves. Kazakhstan also has the highest oil reserves from the LLDCs, ranking eleventh in the world. Botswana and Zimbabwe are within the top 8 countries in terms of diamond production in the world. Bolivia has one of the world's largest unexploited lithium reserve bases and according to some estimates possesses about half of world's lithium. Zambia is amongst the top ten copper producing countries in the world.

Some LLDCs are also abundant in energy generation. For example, Paraguay is one of the world's biggest exporters of hydro power energy and accounts for about 8% of world's electricity exports.

Some LLDCs have also been able to take advantage of their natural resources and implement policies that have enabled diversification and export of higher value-added products to wider markets. It is important to support these efforts.

LLDCs, in particular those with relatively large markets, can therefore represent big opportunities for foreign investment from the developed world.

For LLDCs, establishment of sustainable, multi-modal and efficient transport systems is critical for movement of goods, expansion of their trade, and increasing their connectivity. Better connectivity means access to benefits from globalization.

Transit policy, infrastructure development and trade and trade facilitation have therefore been clearly identified amongst the priority areas for the LLDCs in the Vienna Programme of Action.

Development and maintenance of physical infrastructure, including the roads, rails, ports as well as border-crossing infrastructure plays a key role in reducing the high costs of trade and integrating countries to global markets.

In addition, the development of intermodal transport, dry ports or inland container depots, trans-shipment facilities and similar logistic hubs is very important for enabling efficient changes between modes of transport and in connecting LLDCs to markets.

One of the specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action is to significantly improve intermodal connectivity with the aim of ensuring efficient transfers from rail to road and vice versa and from port to rail and/or road and vice versa.

It is important to achieve the optimal combination of the different modes of transport and effectively integrate the different modes with ports. Closing of any missing links is the basis for the establishment of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system.

While LLDCs have been developing and upgrading their road and rail infrastructure, including intra-regional links, many missing links still remain. For example, the Trans-African highway has numerous missing links, in particular in Central Africa, where many LLDCs lie. In terms of rail, there are over 26,000 km of missing links in the rail network in Africa and around 10% of the Trans-Asian Railway network are missing links. Overall, 9 LLDCs do not have a railway network.

In addition to closing the missing links, it is also important to ensure that the roads and rails are of good standards, which is of particular importance for LLDCs. For example, about 8% of the Asian Highway network does not meet the minimum desirable standards. This number rises to 17% for LLDCs in the region and many of those roads are those that connect with neighbouring countries.

Close cooperation with transit countries in their respective sub-regions on transit transport is a necessity. The development of efficient multimodal intra-regional transit corridors and networks is one of the direct ways to bring about integration and connectivity. Corridors help to prioritize the integrated development of infrastructure to close the missing links.

Given the increased interest in transit corridors and economic corridors, it is important to facilitate the sharing of lessons learned and best practices, within as well as amongst regions.

China's Belt and Road Initiative brings a great opportunity for not only sharing of experience, but truly connecting East and West and the countries in between in spirit of win-win cooperation for shared prosperity. This is particularly important for LLDCs, as 15 of the 32 LLDCs are part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

At the same time as developing hard infrastructure, it is necessary to create an enabling legal framework, harmonize and simplify transit transport rules and procedures in order to ensure efficient border crossings.

The benefits of harmonized international regulatory framework for transport and transit cooperation include more efficient border controls, simplified procedures, cheaper and faster transport, more transparency and enhanced cooperation.

It is therefore important that LLDCs and transit countries ratify the key transport conventions such as the TIR convention, the Harmonization convention, as well as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

UN-OHRLLS has been actively helping to promote the accession by LLDCs and transit countries to key trade and transport facilitation conventions.

Ratification also has to be followed by effective implementation of the conventions and their provisions at the national level in order to deliver the real benefits.

Effective use of trade facilitation measures and innovations such as single windows, electronic payment, increased computerization of border crossing and transit processes, customs cooperation would all help in further making transport easier and faster for the LLDCs and enhance their connectivity.

In concluding, the needs of the LLDCs in the transport sector are great. But so are the opportunities. The achievement of the SDGs can only be successful if attention is paid to the most vulnerable countries and if no one is left behind.

Thank you for your attention.