

**ESCAP/OHRLLS/ECE/Government of Lao PDR Final Regional Review of the Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries**

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**OPENING STATEMENT  
BY  
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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ESCAP**

His Excellency Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Lao Peoples Democratic Republic and Chair of the Group of LLDCs

His Excellency Mr. Sommad Pholsena, Minister of Public Works and Transport, Government of Lao Peoples Democratic Republic

His Excellency Ambassador Saleumxay Kommasith, Permanent Representative of Lao PDR to the United Nations in New York and Chairperson, LLDC Coordination Bureau

His Excellency Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to welcome you all to the ESCAP/OHRLLS/ECE/Government of Lao PDR Final Regional Review of the Almaty Programme of Action for the LLDCs (APoA). Our deep and profound gratitude goes to Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Lao Peoples Democratic Republic and Chair of the Group of LLDCs, for gracing this event. Your leadership will guide us in conducting a highly successful review of the APoA. Please allow me, Excellency, to take this opportunity to also congratulate your Government in joining the WTO in February 2013 and successfully organizing the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM 9) in November 2012.

Our appreciation goes to the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for extending their untiring support to my ESCAP team in organizing this regional review here in Vientiane.

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

As we gather here today in Vientiane to conduct the final regional ten-year review of the Almaty Programme of Action for the LLDCs, we must remind ourselves of the important tasks that are ahead of us. The review we conduct and the Outcome Document we adopt will form substantive input into the preparation of the ten-Year Review Conference of the Almaty Programme of Action, scheduled to be held in 2014 and to the post-2015 development agenda. As you know, the High Level Panel on 2015 development agenda will be holding its meeting in March in Bali and I will be taking the Outcome Document of this meeting to that conference. I firmly believe that the LLDCs deserve a programme of action for the next decade that will help them in achieving inclusive and sustainable development with full international support.

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

Let me turn to the progress achieved and constraints encountered in implementing *the 4 priority areas of the Almaty Programme of Action*. As you all know, the implementation status of the programme by Asia-Pacific LLDCs was assessed in the Midterm Review Meeting in 2008. ESCAP in collaboration with the Government of Mongolia carried out another assessment in April 2011 which adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, paving the way, among other things, for the establishment of the International Think Tank on LLDCs.

Let me touch on the 4 areas now. As regards *transport infrastructure development*, significant progress has been made in the past ten years thanks due also to enhanced support extended by the transit countries among other development partners. In this respect, the work of the ESCAP secretariat has been geared towards the realization of the vision of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in Asia, with a focus on the development and upgrading of the Asian Highway (AH) and Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) networks together with the development of dry ports, linking LLDCs to high-growth coastal areas in corridors of prosperity.

However, infrastructure gaps still remain and must be closed but in a manner that achieve inclusive and sustainable development. Since the agreements on the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway are important interventions for improving LLDCs' access to regional and world markets, I would strongly urge those member States that have not done so yet to consider becoming Parties to these agreements. We regard LLDC not as landlocked but as Land Linked Developing Countries. So, let us use our comparative advantage.

The LLDCs and transit countries in the region continue to face many challenges in implementing *transit transport* priorities under APoA. For instance, lack of a common framework for transit transport facilitation for the Asia- Pacific region is one of most difficult challenges to address. Many transit facilitation measures have been taken in relative isolation, leading to fragmented outcomes and lack of possible synergies could not be realized. Moreover, the operational issues continue to impede transit transport due to rapid increase in the flow of goods, vehicles and people across the borders.

In order to start addressing these challenges, member States have adopted a common Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport. The ESCAP secretariat has developed a set of transport facilitation models and established a Regional Network of Legal and Technical Experts for Transport Facilitation to support the implementation of their framework.

In my current role as chair of the Global Migration Group, I would also suggest that we consider the issue of international migration in the context of employment and human resource development, as people are crossing borders in search of jobs.

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed encouraging to see that the LLDCs and neighboring transit countries have made great effort to improve their *trade competitiveness and trade facilitation*. However, the new ESCAP - World Bank trade cost database released just a few weeks ago shows that trade costs of LLDCs are still extremely high, typically 4 to 7 times higher than those of most other middle-income developing countries in Asia largely because of the constraints they face due to their lack of access to the sea. Furthermore, limited progress has been made in terms of obtaining nondiscriminatory market access by LLDCs of the region with only four countries having successfully managed accession to WTO since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action, including the Lao PDR that has just fulfilled the conditions. As many as six countries in Asia-Europe region are currently undergoing WTO accession. I urge the international community to facilitate this process of accession to WTO of LLDCs on easy and expedited terms, thereby providing them the fruits of the multilateral framework of trade and market access.

The exports of LLDCs continue to be characterized by a high concentration on a few commodities reflecting their poor productive capacities. We need to ensure duty-free-quota-free market access to our LDCs that are also landlocked. ESCAP member States made it very clear that more regional cooperation was needed in facilitating transit trade, when they adopted ESCAP Resolution 68/3 on "Enabling paperless trade and the cross-border recognition of electronic data and documents for inclusive and sustainable intraregional trade facilitation" during the 68<sup>th</sup> ESCAP Commission Session

in May 2012. We can only take advantage of trade possibilities if we develop our productive capacity.

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

The progress in implementing the Almaty Programme of Action has thus been affected by the high structural vulnerability of the LLDCs. With the world economy undergoing dramatic changes over the last few years, those vulnerabilities have also been further accentuated. The modest economic growth achieved by the LLDCs during the last decade has recently come under increasing pressure due to successive global crises in the areas of finance, food, and fuel. Many are also severely affected by the adverse impact of climate change and natural disasters. The economic crisis, especially the collapse in aggregate demand from developed countries through the trade channel, led to job and income losses especially in key export industries in the LLDCs. The unemployment rate has risen sharply in many of them, creating sharp socio-political impacts in the absence of sufficient social protection programmes. Consequently, most LLDCs are finding it very difficult in achieving various development goals including the MDGs. In this situation, the most unmet MDG goals are unfortunately gender related especially the goals on maternal mortality, hunger, and child malnutrition. We cannot leave women and the next generation behind. The APoA for the next decade must be more people centered and address the needs of the people on the ground

It is clear that LLDCs, as a group of countries with special needs, need to be supported by the international community in their endeavour for inclusive and sustainable development. As a part of my resolve to assist our member states, I have recently established 3 new sub-regional offices to cater to the specific needs of member States and pay them a much closer attention. The North and Central Asia Office has been established in Almaty in order to better address the Central Asian LLDCs. This office coordinates the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) that serves as a platform for this group of LLDCs to discuss and formulate various approaches towards the development of a cooperation framework for sustainable and inclusive development.

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