

**The Awaza Summary Statement of the Ministerial Transport Conference of Landlocked
Developing Countries,
16 August 2022, Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan**

Ministers and high-level representatives from landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), met in person (and virtually) on 15 and 16 August 2022 in Awaza, in the city of Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan, with participation of other relevant stakeholders including representatives from transit developing countries, development partners, United Nations, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, regional development banks, think tanks, private sector and other stakeholders. The Ministerial Conference was organized by the Government of Turkmenistan in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developing Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) under the theme Ashgabat Process: Financing for Better Connectivity.

In view of the discussions held, the Ministerial Conference made a call on the following actions to enhance transport connectivity of LLDCs and accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs and for consideration as input to the preparatory process of the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs to be held in 2024.

The important role of enhanced transport connectivity for sustainable recovery of LLDCs from COVID-19 pandemic

- The important role of transit transport in connecting LLDCs to international and regional markets was underscored. The critical role of efficient transit mechanisms through close cooperation with transit countries was also underscored in bringing LLDCs' connectivity at par with other countries. All modes of transport were addressed (road, rail, aviation and waterways).
- Transport connectivity was viewed as an essential means to achieve the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals and as critical for sustainable recovery of LLDCs from COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Ministers acknowledged the opportunity to not only build back better but to include the development of sustainable and resilient infrastructure to help mitigate climate change.

Progress and challenges in achieving the transport connectivity specific objectives of the VPoA, and the transport related SDGs, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Although the LLDCs made some progress on the indicators of transport infrastructure development and connectivity, it is uneven and LLDCs are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the relevant priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action.
- The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the introduction of new border and transit requirements that led to border restrictions or closures, disrupted global supply chains, delays in delivery of essential goods including food and medicines, and loss of jobs in the transport sector. These impacts exposed LLDCs' vulnerabilities.

- The COVID-19 pandemic further hindered the pace of transport infrastructure development and maintenance in LLDCs as resources were diverted to more urgent health and welfare needs arising from the pandemic.
- While transport activity has begun to recover globally, the recovery is uneven and LLDCs remain behind. Pandemic recovery funds should also be directed to the development of sustainable transport infrastructure.
- The LLDCs need support to expand their sustainable transport systems, build resilient infrastructure and improve their links with international markets, trade and tourism, including by adopting the “peoples first” public private partnership (PPP) approach.
- The Conference called on the international community to support activities on enhancing regional cooperation and coordination in transport development to establish an efficient transport system
- It was also underlined that, beyond provision of physical transport infrastructure, improving the soft infrastructure components was also very important to facilitate the efficient movement of goods, passengers and vehicles, and to reduce transport costs.
- Deliberations concluded that energy infrastructure and ICT connectivity were also crucial for increased efficiency in transport and transit systems in LLDCs.

Enhancing Financing of Transport connectivity for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening of partnerships

- Bridging the transport infrastructure gap to achieve seamless connectivity of the 32 LLDCs is contingent on the mobilization of large-scale investment and financing. The pre-COVID-19 estimate of cumulative financing needs of \$510 billion for LLDCs’ sustainable transport infrastructure needs is likely to have further increased in the last two years. New and additional funding from all sources will be instrumental in efforts to reach this goal..
- However, mobilizing investment and financing is increasingly challenging amid global economic headwinds due to rising inflation, growing and competing developmental needs and slowing economic growth that are exacerbating resource constraints borne out the of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is therefore a risk of the further exacerbation LLDCs’ structural vulnerabilities and their being left behind in the post-COVID environment.
- Mobilizing investment and financing for LLDCs’ transport infrastructure from all available sources is vital. Bilateral, multilateral, and multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives remain essential to support sustainable transport transformation in LLDCs and should be enhanced. Leveraging the role of the private sector including through public-private partnerships, floating equity and debt instruments in capital markets and blended finance can help address some of the resource deficits.

- The international community should work towards at-least doubling annual investments for infrastructure development in the LLDCs from all sources, including domestic resources, official development assistance, north-south, south-south and triangular cooperation and public-private partnerships and national and multilateral development banks.
- Multilateral financial and development institutions and regional development banks should establish dedicated infrastructure funding for the LLDCs and provide the LLDCs with a special window for allocation of resources for infrastructure development and maintenance. Participants emphasized the need for international and regional finance institutions to simplify and expedite the process for LLDCs' transport infrastructure projects' funding applications.
- The international community should provide financial and technical support for LLDCs to develop bankable projects and concrete project pipelines, particularly with regard to the preparation of feasibility studies, negotiation of complex contracts, and the management of projects. Efforts should aim to develop local skills and capacity.
- The Conference asserted that for LLDCs to achieve seamless connectivity and develop resilient infrastructure, strengthened cooperation and partnerships between all stakeholders was imperative.
- It particularly called for greater collaboration on capacity building, transport data, road safety, formulating bankable infrastructure projects, and the greater use of information and communication technologies in transport and transit systems.

Promotion of corridors, regional connectivity, integrated multimodal transport systems and seamless connectivity of transport and trade

- Transport corridors are considered as backbones of transportation networks, linking major gateways and hubs and can be an important means to enhancing LLDCs connectivity to markets, achieving efficient transit and reducing LLDCs transport costs by providing more efficient and effective transport and logistics services.
- Effective and efficient, transit transport corridors need not only to have good and well-maintained transport infrastructure, they also require smooth implementation of agreed legal frameworks, transit rules and policies and transport and trade facilitation measures.
- Participants reaffirmed the relevance of corridors to current transport specific objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action such as reducing travel time along corridors, reducing the time spent at land borders and others aimed at facilitating transit transport and trade.
- Ministers renewed the call to promote multimodal transversal road, rail and waterways corridors that complement each other instead of competing.
- Calls were made to address the creation of economic corridors by promoting regional economic complementarity and coordination

Accelerating digitalization for enhanced transit and trade facilitation and for sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19

- It is estimated that, on average, LLDCs pay more than double what the transit countries incur in transport costs and take a longer time to send and receive merchandise goods from overseas markets. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges. The disruptions in global shipping and port operations also led to further delays and increased trade costs face by LLDCs.
- Enhancing the implementation of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation as well as other international and regional trade and transport-related conventions, regulations, and agreements including the United Nations inland transport conventions, by LLDCs, transit countries and their trade partners is fundamental
- There is need for enhanced support towards implementation of the initiatives and towards areas notified by LLDCs under the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation as needing support to implement including related to ICT, human capacity.
- Participants further resolved to renew efforts to reshape transport networks and planning by optimizing operations through smart hubs, organizing routes and schedule s to reduce empty mileage, improving land use planning, and harmonizing regulatory frameworks across the transport sector.
- The WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) mandated the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee to include in their agenda, an annual dedicated session to discuss transit issues of landlocked country members until next review in 2026. LLDCs, with the support of relevant organizations, should effectively engage and use the sessions to elaborate on tangible solutions to achieving efficient transit by LLDCs.
- LLDCs need to scale up the use of ICT, including through the creation of an enabling environment, to facilitate transit and trade and international and regional organizations as well as relevant UN organisations should scale up support towards ICT Connectivity and ICT solutions to facilitate trade and transit. The use of best practices should be encouraged through transfer of modern technologies, technical assistance, and capacity building towards LLDCs and transit countries.

Sustainable mobility, environmentally sustainable and resilient transport systems, climate change adaptation and mitigation – experiences and best practices

- Climate change related natural disasters such as flooding, storms, drought, cyclones, heatwaves and other extreme climate events weaken infrastructure (including roads and rail) in many LLDCs, resulting in infrastructure loss and destruction and in high economic costs. These disasters impact transit trade and constrain LLDC's capacity to compete on the global market.
- Considering that about a third of CO₂ emissions come from the transport sector, mitigating the impacts of climate change is as important as adapting to its impacts. However, LLDCs lack

the financial and technical capacities needed to fully implement adaptation and mitigation approaches that are crucial to accelerate their sustainable development progress.

- Transport and infrastructure are bound to experience continued and increased impacts of climate change. There is therefore a strong need to invest in climate resilient infrastructure and to increase the resilience of transport systems in LLDCs and transit countries. This can be achieved by taking into account climate risks when planning, designing, operating, budgeting and maintaining transport infrastructure.
- Bearing in mind that climate change can disrupt transit trade and interconnected supply chains, there is a need to assist LLDCs in accelerating their transition to low-carbon energy sources and technologies. This requires enhanced bilateral, multilateral, and multi-stakeholder partnerships to ensure sustainable transport transformations and green mobility in these countries.
- It is also imperative to build LLDCs' capacity to mobilize the resources and services needed to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change in the transport sector, and to be prepared to in case of climate emergencies.

Way forward

- LLDCs, transit countries, development partners and relevant stakeholders are called upon to engage fully in the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to develop and further improve transport systems for the benefit of the LLDCs and fully implement the outcomes and recommendations of this meeting.
- Financial institutions are called upon to enhance the allocation of financial resources to accelerate the development of sustainable transport infrastructure and related services in LLDCs, to complement their national efforts and investment.
- Recognizing the importance of continuing the Ashgabat process on sustainable transport, launched at the First Global Sustainable Transport Conference, the Ministers welcomed the holding of regular high-level international meetings within the framework of this process including on transit transport, access to energy, transportation and transit of energy resources to and from LLDCs.
- The Ministers, noting the importance of addressing transport, customs, visa and other trade and transport facilitating issues to promote practical implementation of international transport and transit corridors, agreed on the necessity to hold relevant multilateral consultations, capacity building and training activities in the framework of the Ashgabat process.
- The Parties welcomed the outcomes of the Meeting of Ministers of Transport held during the Conference in the "Central Asia - Middle East - Africa" format and underlined the importance of continuing this dialogue on a systematic basis. Such regional and sub-regional dialogue should be promoted in different regions.

- Efficient and effective preparations and successful organization of the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs to be held in 2024 is important as outlined in the General Assembly resolution 76/217. The Conference will formulate and adopt a renewed framework for international support to address the special needs of LLDCs and to strengthen partnerships between the LLDCs and transit countries and their development partners. The relevant United Nations Organizations and other international and regional organizations are invited to provide inputs to the preparatory process.
- Landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners were encouraged to take a very active role in the preparatory process and attend the conference in 2024 at the highest possible level.

Acknowledgement

The participants expressed profound appreciation to the Government of Turkmenistan for generously hosting the meeting and for its financial contribution to the successful organization of the Ministerial Conference.

The participants expressed gratitude to the substantial support of UN-OHRLLS for the successful preparation for and organization of the conference.

The participants expressed appreciation for the efforts undertaken by Botswana in its capacity as the Global Chair of the Group of LLDCs and its capacity of Coordinator for trade and development issues of the Group of LLDCs in Geneva

The participants also appreciated the active participation and substantive contributions by LLDCs, transit developing countries, development partners, UN system organizations, multi-lateral and regional development banks, other international and regional organizations, development partners, the private sector, think tanks and other stakeholders.