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Groups of countries in special situations: follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

Letter dated 28 September 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Zambia addressed to the President of the General Assembly

In my capacity as Chair of the Bureau of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the Ministerial Declaration of the annual ministerial meeting of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, held on 20 September 2017, on the sidelines of the general debate of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly (see annex). Through their participation, meeting attendees contributed to the review of progress made and challenges faced in mainstreaming the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 and to the identification of recommendations and opportunities for accelerating its implementation and that of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level in landlocked developing countries, as well as at the regional and global levels.

I should be most grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 22 (b).

(Signed) Lazarous **Kapambwe**
Ambassador

Permanent Representative
Chair of the Landlocked Developing Countries



Annex to the letter dated 28 September 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Zambia addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Ministerial Declaration

Annual ministerial meeting of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries

New York, 20 September 2017

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), have met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, on 20th September 2017, on the occasion of the 72nd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and have held our deliberations under the theme “*Accelerating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”,

Recognizing that the lack of territorial access to the sea, aggravated by remoteness from world markets and high transit costs and risks, continue to impose serious constraints on export earnings, private capital inflow and domestic resource mobilization of LLDCs and therefore adversely affects their overall sustainable development,

Reaffirming also that Land-locked States shall have the right of access to and from the sea for the purpose of exercising the rights provided for in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, including those relating to the freedom of the high seas and the common heritage of mankind,

Recalling the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2014–2024 is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its full implementation is fundamental to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by the LLDCs, and ensuring that no one is left behind, further reiterate that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, are universal, indivisible and interlinked; as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda that is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and also the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,

Recalling also the Livingstone Call for Action for the Accelerated Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action Conference held in Livingstone, Zambia, in June 2015 that highlights key measures and initiatives required to accelerate implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action,

Recalling further the General Assembly resolutions [71/239](#) and [70/217](#) related to the particular needs and challenges of LLDCs to be addressed by the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action,

Welcoming the following outcomes and acknowledging important events to the group of LLDCs since the last annual Ministerial meeting; the *Ministerial Declaration of the 2017 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* convened under the theme “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”; the entry into force of the *WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement* in February 2017, as well as the High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on *Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* held in Hanoi, Viet Nam in March 2017,

Having considered the importance of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries and also in view of the need to accelerate its implementation, declare as follows;

1. **Take note** of the Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024;¹
2. **Further call** for the accelerated implementation of the Vienna Program of Action and encourage LLDCs who have not yet mainstreamed the Vienna Programme of Action into their national development planning to do so. We also urge development partners and the UN agencies, in particular OHRLLS to provide assistance to LLDCs to mainstream the Vienna Programme of Action and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in their national development strategies;
3. **Reaffirm** our commitment to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for all people everywhere, ensuring that no one is left behind. We reaffirm all the principles recognized in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, and emphasize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development;
4. **Underscore** that the Vienna Programme of Action is integral to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its full implementation is critical for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by the LLDCs. We stress the importance of fostering strong synergy and coherence at all levels in the implementation, follow-up, and review of the Vienna Programme of Action with the 2030 Agenda and other development processes including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Nairobi Maafikiano;
5. **Welcome** progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels. In this regard, we stress that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the revitalized Global Partnerships should take into account the vulnerabilities and special needs and challenges facing LLDCs. We stress that collective action can promote policy integration, facilitate inclusive partnerships and provide support for poverty eradication;
6. **Recognise** the LLDCs' efforts to make progress in human and social development. However, significant investments are still needed to support LLDCs to combat poverty and hunger, and to improve health, education, and water and sanitation. We call for scaled-up support to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 in LLDCs;
7. **Also recognise** that investment into quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, connectivity, transportation, water and sanitation, as well as information and communications technologies are important for the LLDCs to improve their competitiveness and fully integrate into the global economy, and further **call on** bilateral and multilateral development partners to increase technical and financial assistance towards sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in the LLDCs, including, through strengthening of public private partnerships, to facilitate investment in infrastructure development and support towards negotiating public private partnerships agreements that are in the country's best interest;
8. **Welcome** the convening of the 2017 Global Infrastructure Forum and we call on development partners to accelerate financing infrastructure Projects in LLDCS in line with national and regional priorities;

¹ A/72/272.

9. **Further recognise** that LLDCs hold great potential for the production of renewable energy, however energy investment in LLDCs continues to be low due to lack of adequate financial resources and capacity constraints in policy formulation and regulatory institutions. We therefore call on bilateral and multilateral development partners to enhance their support to the LLDCs to use these resources. We further call on development partners to mobilize the provision of technology transfer on concessional and preferential terms and the diffusion of new and existing environmentally sound technologies to LLDCs, as set out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation;

10. Considering that energy is critical for the LLDCs, we **welcome** the international exhibition, EXPO-2017, held under the theme “Future Energy” in Astana, as well as the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to establish the International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects to provide a platform for the development and dissemination of renewable energy initiatives;

11. **Express concern** that the LLDCs continue to face high costs of broadband including mobile-cellular, and call on multilateral development banks and development partners to enhance financial and technical assistance to the LLDCs in order to develop the necessary hard and soft ICT infrastructure as well as develop robust ICT Policies;

12. **Calls upon** development partners to support efforts by landlocked developing countries in the field of infrastructure development and maintenance and support landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries in sharing experiences on transit transport development;

13. **Reaffirm** that international trade is an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction and can contribute to the promotion of sustainable development, and recognize the declining proportion of global merchandise exports from the LLDCs, and therefore call for improved market access for the LLDCs, and call upon development partners to enhance Aid for Trade towards the LLDCs to further integrate them into the global economy. We also express our deep concern at the increase in protectionist tendencies;

14. **Welcome** the entry into force of the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement and call for its full and timely implementation and encourage all World Trade Organisation Members to expedite its full implementation, and **urge** members to continue to provide technical, financial and capacity building assistance to LLDCs, on a sustainable basis, for the effective implementation of the Agreement;

15. **Recognise** that LLDCs are still heavily dependent on export of primary commodities and their economies remain undiversified thus making them vulnerable to volatile prices of commodities and external shocks; and further recognize that inclusive and sustainable industrialization is important for the structural transformation of our economies. We call on development partners, the UN system, including UNIDO to provide support in implementing our industrial and trade policies;

16. **Acknowledge** that innovation is essential for harnessing the economic potential of each nation and the importance of supporting entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, which add new momentum for economic growth and job creation and expand opportunities for all, including women and youth; and highlight the importance of innovation-driven development and the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises so as to increase employment in all sectors. **We call** on development partners to share innovative technologies, scientific knowledge and technical know-how and best practices;

17. **Stress** the importance of LLDCs integrating into regional and global value chains to expand their export markets and diversify their export base; and therefore call on development partners, transit countries and international organizations to help the LLDCs to strengthen their capacity to participate in regional and global value chains and in identifying the best opportunities for developing new products and export markets, given their comparative advantages;

18. **Welcome** the entry into force of the Paris Agreement and we encourage all its parties to fully implement the Agreement and to fully comply with the voluntary national commitments. We stress the importance of continued support for international cooperation on adaptation and mitigation efforts and on strengthening resilience. We further stress the necessity of adequate and predictable financial resources from a variety of sources, including public and private ones, to facilitate implementation of the Agreement and for enhanced support of the landlocked developing countries to address the challenges of climate change, land degradation, desertification, and deforestation in an integrated manner;

19. **Welcome** the outcome of the United Nations Conference to Support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and take note of its seven partnership dialogues. We recognise the challenges faced by the LLDCs to fully participate in the implementation of SGD-14 including; limited access to the sea, limited resources and capacity constraints. We call on partners, regional and international organizations to recognize the peculiar challenges of the LLDCs in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other regional and international agreements related to the use and conservation of the oceans and the seas and we call on their assistance in addressing the challenges of the LLDCs.

20. **Further reaffirm** that the area of the seabed and ocean floor and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, as well as its resources, are the common heritage of mankind, the exploration and exploitation of which shall be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole, irrespective of the geographical location of States;

21. **Recognize** the crucial role of deeper regional integration in the development of LLDCs by improving transit transport connectivity and ensuring greater intraregional trade, common regulatory policies, border agency cooperation and harmonized customs procedures to expand regional markets;

22. **Underscore** the significance of international transport corridors for regional sustainable development, and request for strengthening of the role of economic corridors, corridor management organizations, sub-regional arrangements, inter-regional and regional groupings. Stress the importance of focusing on a transport corridor framework as a first stage for cost reduction to support trade along the routes and reduce congestion at entry points, hence promoting the smooth movement of goods and services;

23. **Recognise** the importance of mainstreaming regional connectivity in all the dimensions, including economic, socio-cultural and people-to people, which is vital for increasing their competitiveness and diversification and helping to maximise the benefits of globalization;

24. **Call on** the LLDCs that have not done so to accede to and ratify relevant international, regional and sub-regional conventions and other legal instruments related to transit, transport and trade facilitation and ensure their effective implementation, with a view to reduce transport prices and time for the landlocked developing countries. Also encourage transit countries to fully comply with their obligations under the international law related to freedom of transit, transport and

trade facilitation. Furthermore, we encourage the use of information technologies and electronic systems and improved border agency cooperation to improve transit traffic along transport routes;

25. **Welcome** the launch of the World Customs Organisation Transit Guidelines during the Global Transit Conference held in Brussels in July 2017. We call on the development partners to assist the LLDCs and transit countries to implement transit and trade facilitating measures contained in the World Customs Organisation Transit Guidelines;

26. **Recognize** that the LLDCs and transit countries should collaborate to establish secure, reliable, efficient, quality and sustainable infrastructure and transit transport systems, and upgrade existing infrastructure to international standards, with the support of development partners, including multilateral financial and development institutions and regional banks;

27. **Affirm** that traffic in transit shall not be conditioned upon collection of any fees or charges imposed in respect of transit, except the charges for transportation or those commensurate with administrative expenses entailed by transit or with the cost of services rendered and stress that improved trade facilitation, including through further streamlining and harmonization of customs and transit procedures and enhanced transparency is critical for effective utilization of transport corridors;

28. **Encourage** the participatory and collaborative regional development of relevant tools, including a freedom of transit index, to measure, compare and reflect the challenges that confront the LLDCs and elaborate more adequate public policies to overcome these obstacles;

29. **Concerned** with the declining trend of official development assistance to LLDCs and in this regard call for an enhanced predictable, reliable and sustainable flow of official development assistance to meet the regular development challenges as well as the new and emerging challenges including on climate change in landlocked developing countries; and also call on development partners to provide sustainable and timely support to the LLDCs, including through finance, technology transfer and capacity-building to strengthen their disaster risk reduction and early warning system in accordance with their needs and priorities;

30. **Invite** multilateral financial and development institutions and regional development banks to establish dedicated infrastructure funding for the LLDCs and provide them with a special window for allocation of resources for infrastructure development and maintenance and to undertake analytical work and provide support towards better project preparation;

31. **Underline** the prominent role that foreign direct investment plays in accelerating development and poverty reduction and we therefore encourages Member States to facilitate foreign direct investment flows to LLDCs. We commit to continue promoting conducive policies to attract foreign direct investment that leads to promote trade as well as sustainable development of LLDCs. We also call on development partners to provide greater support to the foreign direct investment-seeking efforts of LLDCs;

32. **Invite** development partners and the international financial and development institutions to make voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund established by the Secretary-General to support the activities related to the follow-up and the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action;

33. **Reaffirm** that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda is imperative to implement the SDGs and in this regard, we welcome the convening of the Second ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum and we encourage all our development partners to

implement its inter governmentally negotiated outcome, particularly those commitments related to LLDCs;

34. **Welcome** reaching the required ratifications of the UN Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries and we look forward to the entry into force of the Agreement that will take effect on 6 October 2017. The International Think Tank will enhance the analytical capabilities of the LLDCs, provide home-grown research to cater for their specific needs, promote the interests of the LLDCs as well as strengthen their collective voice at global level including at the UN to defend the interests of the LLDCs;

35. **Call for** formalization and stress the need for convening the inaugural meeting of the Board of Governors at the highest level for the International Think Tank soon after the entry into force of the Agreement to establish the secretariat, and further call on the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries to continue to support the International Think Tank to facilitate its formalisation;

36. **Further call upon** the Member States, United Nations system organizations and other stakeholders to provide voluntary contributions to the International Think Tank;

37. **Urge** all LLDCs that have not yet ratified the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries to do so;

38. **Adopt** the revised Rules of Procedure of the Group of the LLDCs as agreed on 5th June 2017 annexed to this Declaration in order to enhance the work of the Group;²

39. **Call** for the effective and comprehensive high-level midterm review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action pursuant to the General Assembly resolution 69/137. The high-level midterm review should review progress on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and launch concrete and specific global initiatives and provide strong impetus to the realization of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. **Further call** on the **convening** of the meetings of the Ministers of Transport and Ministers of Trade preceding the comprehensive mid-term review of the Vienna Programme of Action;

40. **Request** the Secretary-General of the United Nations to undertake all necessary measures to provide necessary resources to carry out the tasks related to the preparation of the comprehensive mid-term review of the Vienna Programme of Action;

41. **Further take note** of Secretary General's efforts to undertake reforms of the UN development system. We emphasise that these reforms should be centred on the 2030 Agenda and should take into account the peculiar challenges and the needs of the LLDCs;

42. **Appreciate** the important role played by the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and we call for its continued coordinated follow-up, effective monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, and to undertake advocacy efforts at the national, regional and global levels, including to undertake research and analysis on issues specific to the LLDCs in addressing the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action;

² See A/72/656 for the text of the revised Rules of Procedure of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries.

43. **Welcome** the appointment of the Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu as the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and we request OHRLLS to continue to work on addressing the challenges faced by the LLDCs;

44. **Express** our sincere recognition to the Government of the Republic of Zambia, for the efforts undertaken in coordinating the Group’s activities in its capacity as the Chair of the Group of LLDCs.
