



**MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE TO THE ASIAN REGIONAL MEETING OF
LANDLOCKED AND TRANSIT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

Bangkok, 24 April 2003

It gives me great pleasure to convey my greetings to all of you who have gathered as part of the first phase of the 59th session of ESCAP. Under the agenda item 7 of this phase, the “transit transport issues in landlocked and transit developing countries” will be considered as part of the preparatory process for the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation to be held in August this year in Almaty, Kazakhstan. I send this message as I am not able to join your deliberations. I attach particular importance to the Asian regional input as 12 out of 30 landlocked developing countries are in Asia. Also, the first-ever global event convened by the United Nations to discuss issues relating to the landlocked developing countries will be held in your region. This further raises the importance of your present deliberations.

My special thanks go to UNESCAP and its Executive-Secretary Mr. Kim Hak-Su for the successful preparation of the Asian regional meeting, though the unforeseen circumstances have prevented it from being held as such. I am especially pleased that the UNESCAP secretariat has successfully organized four sub-regional consultations in South-east Asia, North-east Asia, Central Asia and South Asia, outcomes of which would constitute building blocks for the Asian regional platform on transit transport cooperation, which you will consider and adopt.

The basic developmental disadvantages of landlocked developing countries are linked particularly to their geographical handicap. The lack of sovereign access to the sea, remoteness from major international markets, inadequate transport infrastructure, the cumbersome transit procedures imply that these countries have to bear additional costs for their external trade transaction. The costs of international transport services are a crucial determinant of export competitiveness of these countries. Shipping costs represent a more binding constraint to greater participation in international trade than tariffs for landlocked developing countries. Therefore, establishment of efficient transit transport systems is an important prerequisite for them to effectively integrate into the world economy.

The United Nations has long recognized special needs of the landlocked developing countries. It was little over forty years ago when the General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution 1028 (XI) first recognized “the need of landlocked countries for adequate transit facilities in promoting international trade.” At that session, the General Assembly invited the governments of Member States “ [...] to give full recognition to the needs of landlocked member



states in the matter of transit and trade and therefore to accord them adequate facilities...". At that time, in 1957, the landlocked developing countries, members of the United Nations, were few in number; Bolivia and Paraguay in Latin America, and Afghanistan, Bhutan, Laos and Nepal in Asia. To date, the number of landlocked developing countries has increased steeply to 30 countries encompassing all continents of the world, save Australia.

The United Nations family remains strongly committed to helping the landlocked developing countries to overcome the formidable obstacles to their development. Special efforts are being made throughout the UN system to ensure that the needs and concerns of landlocked developing countries are an important consideration for decision-making. The General Assembly has entrusted the Office of the High Representative the responsibility of coordination and monitoring of the internationally agreed measures in favour of these countries, including the 1995 Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation. The Millennium Development Goals emphasized the need to develop global partnerships to address the special needs of the landlocked developing countries.

I hope that the landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners, including the private sector and civil society, will forge partnership that will bring tangible progress in mitigating difficulties faced by landlocked developing countries. Establishment of efficient transit transport systems is the area where the untapped potential of South-South cooperation should be fully utilized. In that spirit of solidarity, please accept my best wishes for the success of your deliberations.

Let me conclude reiterating the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as reflected in the Conference brochure before you, urging all of us to give our strong support to the Ministerial Conference that is the most determined effort to date by landlocked countries, transit nations and the international community to find solutions to the urgent issues of their concern.

(signed)

Anwarul K. Chowdhury
Under-Secretary-General
and High Representative

Secretary-General of the
International Ministerial Conference