



Statement

By

**Mr. Anwarul K. Choudhury
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
And
High Representative for the
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries and Small Island Developing States**

at the

**Meeting of the Heads of State or Government of
Landlocked Developing Countries**

**Havana
14 September 2006**

Mr. President
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely honoured to convey to you all the warm greetings of the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his best wishes for the success of this milestone meeting of the Heads of State or Government of Landlocked Developing Countries. This meeting represents the resolve of landlocked developing countries at the highest political level to promote their shared interest at the global level. It also demonstrates the strong commitment of landlocked developing countries to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action for transit transport cooperation.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere congratulations to Your Excellency Mr. Choumaly Sayasone on your assumption of the high office of the President of the Lao PDR. My congratulations also go to Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith on his appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The renewed commitment of the new leadership of the Lao PDR to the cause of LLDCs is very encouraging. I am sure, outcome of this meeting will provide a strong guidance for the concerted action of the group under your able chairmanship.

Mr. President

By making trade expensive and uncompetitive, geographical disadvantages cannot but have an enormous impact on development prospects of landlocked developing countries. It diminishes export profits, and inflates prices of imported inputs for manufacturing. They are also less likely to attract export-orientated private capital. In addition, transport costs affect a country's choice of trading partners. The United Nations long recognized the special needs of landlocked developing countries and called for specific actions to address their special needs. The most palpable demonstration of this rising concern was the United Nations Conference convened in 2003 in Almaty Kazakhstan. The adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action sent a strong signal of the high priority that the international community places on alleviating the unique problems confronted by landlocked developing countries. It is the first ever UN programme tailored to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries. An innovative feature of the Almaty Programme of Action is its focus on action-oriented specific measures to be undertaken to assist landlocked developing countries. These specific actions are being implemented in five priority areas, namely Fundamental Transit Policy Issues, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, International Trade and Trade Facilitation, International Support Measures, and Implementation and Review. Thus, the Almaty Programme of Action provided a win-win solution for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and it finds support of the international community.

Mr. President,

The main objective of the Almaty Programme is to facilitate LLDCs in their progressive participation in the international trading system. Increased trade opportunities created by further global trade liberalization and improved multilateral trade rules are an important element for development opportunities. It is in this context regrettable that no progress was made in the negotiations in Geneva that led to suspension of trade talks. Landlocked group should use this time

out effectively to prepare for its resumption. The Doha Development Agenda should bring about particular gains for LLDCs, for example in the area of trade facilitation, where new WTO commitments could result in a considerable easing of border and transit procedures now hampering LLDCs export potential, or in the field of transport services to improve the possibilities for LLDCs to get their products rapidly and reliably to the market.

Landlocked developing countries should be pro-active to translate the Almaty agreement into tangible progress. One of the practical areas in this regard is trade facilitation measure. The cost of customs procedures and transport represents the single greatest cost in external trade and is higher than tariffs for goods from landlocked developing countries. Customs and other border crossing procedures accounted for 75 per cent of total delays. Each additional day in transport delays costs 0.5 per cent of cargo value for goods transported by ship or rail. To complete the numerous procedural stages, importing and exporting required 57.3 and 72.3 days for landlocked developing countries. They are almost twice higher than respective world averages. These represent heavy burden on traders of your countries and huge lost opportunities. In view of this, trade facilitation measures have to be vigorously pursued at the national level. Substantial reduction of unnecessary paper works, excessive requirements for licensing and for signature can be achieved with little or without external assistance. Cooperative efforts have to be further strengthened at the bilateral and regional levels. Your political leadership and commitment is decisive factor here. My Office, together with other agencies, is working on developing indicators to measure the progress made in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. Indicators such as number of documents, signatures, delays along with the infrastructure facilities will constitute important elements for the indicators.

The United Nations system organizations continue to facilitate the implementation of the Almaty Programme. Particularly, I would like to emphasize the efforts made by the UN Regional commissions. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network was signed which covers 140,000 kilometers of highways extending to the 32 countries, including 12 LLDCs. The UNECA has been making a valuable contribution through its Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme. The ECA undertook initiative in the area of transit transport facilitation that allows for the observation of abnormal practices along transit corridors; port facilitation; road safety; and harmonization of transit transport documents. UNCTAD and UNDP have been active also in assisting LLDCs. My Office also is making efforts to mobilize international organizations for the implementation of the Almaty Programme. The World Bank, Regional Development Banks, the World Customs Organization, OSCE undertook major initiatives in the areas of transit transport.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, expressing the commitment of my Office to helping landlocked developing countries rise above their geographical impediments through their increased participation in global trade, and in their on going fight against poverty, as we forge ahead to achieve our Millennium Development Goals. I wish you every success in your deliberations. I am confident that the Meeting of the Heads of State or Government of LLDCs will give strong impetus to the efforts to make trade of landlocked developing countries easier and more efficient at all levels, particularly at the national level.

I thank you, Mr. President.