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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary
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at

the opening session of the
Fifth Meeting of Trade Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries
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WTO Room W – Centre William Rappard

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues,

With the 2030 Agenda we have promised to leave no one, and no country behind. Landlocked developing countries face double the trade costs of coastal countries and long distances from major trading markets. They must not be left behind. We must enhance connectivity, increase competitiveness, and facilitate trade. I thank USG Acharya and his team for inviting me here today to present what we can offer and WTO for hosting and co-organising.

Inefficiencies at borders are estimated to cost twice the amount spent on tariffs, duties, import taxes and fees. And transport and transit inefficiencies are blocking access to markets. So transport efficiency and connectivity has been a key priority for UNECE 's Inland Transport Committee - the unique transport body which over the past almost 70 years has developed not less than 58 transport conventions and legal instruments to facilitate transport and transit on roads, rivers and rail.

The General Assembly recognized this in resolution 70/197 last year. It calls for countries to ratify the TIR Convention and the Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods – both hosted in UNECE. The TIR Convention is well known because we all have seen TIR signs on trucks. Thanks to international customs guarantees, TIR enormously reduces the transit time and costs for trucks, thereby helping to meet the objectives of Priority 1 of the Vienna Programme of Action. And we have just launched the electronic version of TIR (eTIR). A pilot transit between Iran and Turkey was successfully completed in December, without any paperwork whatsoever. This will create even faster and smoother transport and transit and pave the way for a multimodal TIR where you can move from trucks to ships and back again. We now see major trading countries in Asia joining the TIR Convention. We hope many more countries will join.

Less known, but no less important, is the Harmonization Convention that increases efficiencies and revenues by optimizing – or as stated ensuring simple and speedy treatment - of cargo at the borders.

These Conventions are some of the most important tools for any landlocked country. Join them. Use them. They are open to all UN Member States. We are

happy to assist you in acceding to and implementing them. We have brochures and reports in the room that that outline our entire spectrum of border crossing facilities, please take a look.

Next, I would like to mention our extensive work on trade facilitation. Many countries are still dealing with cumbersome trade procedures. UNECE has been at the forefront of trade facilitation developments for over 50 years now with UN/CEFACT, the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). More than 480 recommendations, standards, and tools have been developed for trade facilitation in UNECE and they are used by countries and companies all over the world every day to boost competiveness, optimize business processes, and strengthen participation in global markets – and are especially important for LLDCs.

One important example is the Single Window Recommendation. The Single Window and the TIR Convention will take you a long way to having implemented the WTO Trade Facilitation agreement.
Let me also mention UN/EDIFACT, the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport and UN/LOCODES, the global location codes. They are key for trade and transport.

To help countries use these standards and tools and remove red tape we carry out studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. We have done studies for the landlocked countries of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova. They are used. They are useful. And they are appreciated by our member States.

We also do Innovation Performance Reviews which helps member States strengthen innovation policies and increase value-added and thus competitiveness. We have carried out or are planning IPRs for four landlocked countries in our region: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They have been widely appreciated. We hope our Innovation Performance Reviews can inspire other regions.

Another key tool is our UNECE agricultural quality standards. Adhering to these internationally agreed standards helps agricultural products become more attractive to international trade. A supermarket in Switzerland can call Uzbekistan and order "Class I" cucumbers or dried apricots, and it will know exactly what will be in the package it receives, without traveling to Uzbekistan

to inspect the shipment. This is trade facilitation at its finest. And the standards are available to all countries and companies.

One of the least integrated regions in the world is Central Asia, where the countries are all landlocked. UNECE, together with ESCAP, supports the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). Under the SPECA trade programme we have helped to establish national Single Windows and trade facilitation committees in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These efforts also assist in living up to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement – and they greatly help to facilitate trade!

As shown many of our norms, standards and conventions are available to all UN member States. And our online Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide – now done in a close partnership with UNCTAD and ITC - is available freely to everyone and show record hits on the website, all countries can benefit from the myriad of tools, guidelines and recommendations that we develop.

I hope that you will all join us, and use our norms, standards and conventions to make sure that we leave no landlocked country behind!

Thank you.