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**MESSAGE OF MR. CHEICK SIDI DIARRA, UNITED NATIONS UNDER-  
SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST  
DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND  
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

**Conference on the prospects for the development of trans-Asian and Eurasian transit  
transportation through Central Asia till the year 2015  
Dushanbe, 23-24 October 2007**

**Delivered by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS**

I am delighted to convey my greetings to all who have gathered for this important OSCE Conference on the prospects for the development of trans-Asian and Eurasian transit transportation through Central Asia. I would thus like to congratulate the Government of Tajikistan for taking this important initiative and for successfully organizing this conference, in cooperation with the OSCE Secretariat. This conference is particularly crucial as it will contribute a regional perspective and assessment on the transit transport systems in Central Asia to the preparatory process for next year's midterm review meeting of the Almaty Programme of Action.

As the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, it gives me great pleasure to see that the OSCE Members and Partners are very firm in their commitment to accord special attention to the development challenges faced by landlocked countries, as many member states of this body, including partner countries, Afghanistan and Mongolia, belong to the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). It is well recognized here that the establishment of efficient transit transport systems is a powerful tool for boosting economic development and strengthening security and stability in the region.

No one can deny that being landlocked poses great challenges, but geography should not necessarily be taken as a destiny. Concrete and focused actions are required to overcome geographical realities, by developing and maintaining efficient transit transport infrastructure and simplifying border crossing procedures, in a spirit of partnership with the transit neighbours and with the support of the international community.

Central Asian landlocked States are not exceptions. The distances of the Central Asian countries



from the nearest seaports are among the longest in the world. Uzbekistan is doubly landlocked. The Central Asian landlocked states face specific international transit transport situations emerged from the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The transport infrastructure and arrangements in place at that time are not appropriate in the new context which requires contact with new markets and new sources of imports. There has been little reorientation in transit routes to match this new reality. Commodities remain the major export items for these countries. Continued regional tensions further hinder the smooth movement of goods in transit. As a consequence, in all countries, transport infrastructure remains a significant impediment to expansion of trade. Development of new transport network in the new context presents a difficult challenge. It should be also taken into account that the Central Asian Region has tremendous potential as a transit region itself, linking Europe with China and the East. The fast-developing countries to the east and south are interested in promoting their trade with this vast region and use their transit corridors, as a short cut, to the European markets. Central Asia could and is emerging as an important corridor for European and Asian trade links. For the same token, the Caucasian landlocked countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are at the bridge of the traditional Silk Route connecting East Asia and Europe, have large potential benefits for both countries. The Eurasian transport corridors could potentially help these countries become vital transit links between East and West. Inclusive broad based regional cooperation is essential for establishing efficient transit systems in Central Asia and Caucasus.

Within the region, despite remarkable advances, much still remains to be done to reduce cross-border barriers, to facilitate better use of regional resources, and to ensure that the people of the region benefit from improved links among their countries, with their neighbours and with the rest of the world. Increased cooperation among the Central Asian republics will produce large mutual gains by reducing trade and transport costs, improved energy use and will contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for better business and greater investments. These are all prerequisites for the effective integration of Central Asian LLDCs in the international trading system and the world economy.

The United Nations family remains firmly committed to assisting the landlocked developing countries to face these transit transport challenges in their development efforts. With midterm review preparatory process well underway, actions are being taken to ensure effective progress in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, a document that has been widely acclaimed as well-focused and balanced with a clear set of priorities. My Office has already convened two thematic meetings, one on transit transport infrastructure development in Burkina Faso in June and one on international trade and trade facilitation in Mongolia in August to provide substantive inputs to the midterm review assessment. I trust that this OSCE Dushanbe Conference will also be a milestone in this preparatory process and its outcome be an important regional contribution to the review process.

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In conclusion, let me reiterate the commitment of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Developing States to further strengthen our partnership with the OSCE with a view to assisting landlocked countries in addressing their special needs and concerns. In that spirit of partnership, please accept my best wishes for the success of your deliberations.

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