

2 October 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the High Level Plenary Meeting on the Midterm Review of the Almaty Programme  
of Action**

Excellencies,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Friends all,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this high-level plenary meeting on the mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Over the next two days we will focus our attention on the impressive work underway to ensure that landlocked developing countries have transit transport systems to facilitate their access to international trade despite their physical isolation.

As you know, earlier this week the General Assembly concluded its General Debate. I was very pleased that we devoted our time and efforts to two high-level meetings on the special needs of Africa and on the Millennium Development Goals. Both meetings were of particular interest to landlocked countries. It is notable that nine of the fourteen countries with the lowest Human Development Index scores last year are landlocked.

World leaders were in agreement that the turmoil of the world's financial markets must not jeopardize the funding commitments made to Africa and the MDGs. As representatives of landlocked developing countries, you know more than anyone the vulnerability of your economies to erratic markets and the soaring transportation costs. I promise to do all I can as President of the General Assembly to assure the continuing support of the international community for landlocked nations.

We are living in troubled times and billions of people are looking to the United Nations to fulfill the promises of security and well being that they have entrusted to us. As I look at the accomplishments since the 2003 Almaty Conference, I am heartened to see the central and effective role the UN is playing in the implementation of Almaty Programme of Action.

Facilitating negotiations and assisting the implementation of complex development projects is what the United Nations is all about. The success of the Programme can only strengthen the United Nations at a time when it is looking to enhance its participation in international economic policy making.

The 2003 Almaty Conference aimed to forge global partnerships to address the special needs of these countries by tackling their continued marginalization from the world economy in a focused, but holistic fashion.

The resulting Almaty Programme of Action outlines a clear set of priorities for action in transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, and international support measures.

There has been considerable progress since the Almaty Programme of Action was adopted five years ago. Thanks to their cooperative efforts, donor nations, a range of international, regional and subregional organizations and financial institutions have stepped up their targeted assistance and support for the landlocked and transit developing countries.

In and of itself, the decision by the General Assembly to convene the present midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action reflects the commitment of the international community to the full and effective implementation of the programme.

However, much more needs to be done to achieve the Programme's overarching goal of establishing efficient transit transport systems in all landlocked regions of the world.

Geographical realities coupled with critical infrastructure deficiencies, as well as cumbersome border crossing procedures, continue to pose daunting impediments to the external trade of landlocked developing countries.

Landlocked country export development is severely constrained by rising transit transport costs. These limit the range of potential exports and markets in which goods can be competitively and profitably traded.

Today, high trade transaction costs remain the single most important obstacle to the equitable and competitive access by landlocked countries to global markets.

This midterm review is an extremely important exercise to assess what has been achieved so far and what can be done better. It will guide the second half of the implementation period of the Almaty Programme so that it can more effectively assist landlocked developing countries in their effective integration in the international trading system.

We know that success thus far has depended on a range of partners. They have enabled the establishment of more effective transit transport systems that benefit landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbors in all regions of the world.

The generosity and support of Member States has been and will be crucial to safeguard the progress achieved, and to accelerate progress in the years ahead. In this regard, I would like to express special thanks to His Excellency Yukio Takasu of Japan for his excellent work in facilitating the negotiation process of the outcome document that Member States are expected to adopt tomorrow.

Let us all reaffirm, in the course of this meeting, the crucial importance of these partnerships, with the United Nations systems chief among them. Thank you.