



**Statement**

**by**

**Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Special Adviser on Africa**

**and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,**

**Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island**

**Developing States**

**at the**

**Euro-Asian Transport Links Ministerial Meeting**

**19 February 2008, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and the High Representative for the Least Developed countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, I would like to congratulate the UNECE and UNESCAP for the excellent organization of this ministerial meeting on Euro-Asian Transport linkages. Unfortunately, Mr. Diarra could not address you personally due to earlier commitments and therefore has asked me to deliver this statement on his behalf. I quote:

“I would like to commend the UNECE and UNESCAP for the excellent work they have done in the Joint Project on Developing EURO-ASIAN Transport Linkages. Let me also congratulate the Ministers of Transport of countries in the Euro-Asian region for their commitment to further strengthen their cooperation aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian transport links that are so vital for the trade expansion between these two vast continents.

The Euro-Asian Transport Linkage Project provides credible alternatives to maritime transport and contributes to an increase in Euro-Asian inland transport-flows and will facilitate the effective expansion of international trade, economic growth and the opening of new routes towards enhanced trade participation of Asian and European countries in the globalized world economy. The rapidly expanding number of seaports and maritime routes handling the bulk of trade flows between East Asia and Europe can be complemented by Euro-Asian land transport links. Such developments would offer an additional means to overcome disadvantages by providing additional transport options to the existing maritime routes, especially for the landlocked developing countries of the region. Countries in the Euro-Asian region, especially landlocked ones, are highly dependent on others for access to international markets. A weak or missing link in one country can render a whole route economically non-viable for international transport. In addition to lack of adequate transport infrastructure, non-physical bottlenecks, including cumbersome and time consuming border crossings and transit procedures, are weakening their export competitiveness and their economic development. For example, it is estimated that more than half of transit time in road transport from Central Asia to Europe is spent waiting at borders. Transport costs faced by landlocked developing countries are a more important barrier to trade than tariffs themselves. In this regard, the Euro-Asian Transport linkages project has already brought substantial improvements towards the completion of missing links and easing non-physical barriers.

The Office of the High Representative wholeheartedly supports this initiative from the very beginning, as fourteen landlocked developing countries, which are located in Asian and Europe, will benefit from the increased linkages and trade expansion. The Euro-Asian Transport Linkage initiative is closely linked to the 2003 Almaty Programme of Action for landlocked countries and its goals and priorities. The over-arching goal of

the Almaty Programme of Action is to forge partnerships to overcome the special inherent problems of landlocked developing countries, due to their lack of territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets. The Almaty Programme of Action stipulates specific measures to establish efficient transit transport systems, recognizing the link between transport and international trade and economic growth. These specific actions are to be implemented in five priority areas, namely: (1) fundamental transit policy issues, (2) infrastructure development and maintenance, (3) international trade and trade facilitation, (4) international support measures, and (5) implementation and review.

Since its adoption, the Almaty Programme of Action has generated enormous momentum in addressing the special needs of landlocked developing countries. Much progress has been made and though more needs to be done. In view of this, the United Nations General Assembly has decided to convene the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action on 2 and 3 October 2008 at its Headquarters. The review is an important exercise to assess what has been achieved so far, the constraints encountered and to build on the lessons learned so far to accelerate its implementation during the second half of the decade. To raise the political profile of the midterm review the President of the General Assembly will chair the high level event. The UN-OHRLLS has been requested to provide the overall coordination, advocacy and mobilization of political and financial support for the midterm review. In this regard, we have prepared an organizational framework for the midterm review and a conceptual framework to involve all major stakeholders. Two thematic meetings were organized and three regional reviews are underway. The midterm review is expected to adopt a negotiated document with the single purpose of further galvanizing the global partnerships in order to better assist landlocked and transit developing countries in establishing efficient transit transport systems. The review meeting will be held at a high level during two days of the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly session in New York. Preceding the midterm review meeting a number of high level regional meetings and other substantive events will be held in 2008. The Euro-Asian Ministerial Meeting is considered one of the major events in the run-up to the mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Let me take this opportunity to encourage all the ministers present here to take actively participate in the High-level review meeting in October this year to raise the profile and political level of the event.

In conclusion, let me re-iterate my full support to the further development and expansion of the UNECE-UNESCAP Euro-Asian transport linkages project towards further strengthening the role in identifying and prioritizing viable investment projects the Euro-Asian transit corridors. Thus, this initiative aimed at building viable land bridge linking East and West, as did the Silk Road centuries ago.

I wish you every success in your deliberations. Thank you very much.” ...End of quote.