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Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States  
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
Second Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport  
Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Vientiane, 15–16 January 2003

**REPORT OF THE SECOND SPECIFIC CONSULTATIVE MEETING  
ON THE TRANSIT TRANSPORT SYSTEMS OF  
THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**

UNCTAD/LDC/2003/1

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## INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 54/199, the United Nations General Assembly welcomed the efforts being made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in collaboration with donor countries and institutions, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the regional commissions and relevant subregional institutions, to organize specific consultative groups, identify priority areas for action at the national and subregional levels, and draw up action programmes.
2. Following a request by the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) that a specific consultative meeting on transit transport systems of the Lao PDR be organized, the UNCTAD secretariat held consultations with the UNDP, which agreed to provide funds to support the substantive preparations for this meeting. The first meeting was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, from 14 to 15 December 2000. The second meeting was held in Vientiane from 15 to 16 January 2003 with a view to reviewing progress made in the implementation of the Vientiane Programme of Action, adopted at the First Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

## Chapter I

### OPENING OF THE MEETING

3. **H.E. Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR**, in his opening address, extended a warm welcome to all the participants in the Second Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and expressed his appreciation to the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS), UNCTAD and UNDP for their respective roles in the preparation of this event.
4. He indicated that this meeting was being held at a crucial time and that it was part of the preparatory work for the International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation to be held in Kazakhstan in August 2003. Furthermore, the meeting was expected take stock of the implementation of the Vientiane Plan of Action, assessing shortfalls and constraints as well as adopting appropriate policy guidelines for further actions towards the strengthening of the transit transport system of the Lao PDR.
5. Over the past two years there had been a steady development in terms of implementations especially in the areas of legal framework and infrastructure development. The implementation of bilateral and multilateral agreements had been progressing with the signing of several protocols to these agreements. A number of border checkpoints with neighbouring countries had been opened, facilitating transit traffic between the Lao PDR and its transit neighbours. The development of transport infrastructure had produced tangible results, including a 30 per cent increase in the public road network and progress in many transport construction and maintenance projects.

6. He thanked the donor community, the international organizations and financial institutions for giving particular attention to this issue, especially in the area of infrastructure development, by providing technical and financial assistance. He also thanked the transit neighbours for their cooperation and support and expressed his hope that assistance and cooperation would continue to be forthcoming.

7. He emphasized, however, that much more remained to be done to address the problems of the transit transport system. He urged all parties concerned to show more political will to ensure the full implementation of the Vientiane Plan of Action. In its transformation from a landlocked country to a land-linked country, the Lao PDR would need more technical and financial assistance, particularly for the development of institutional and human capacities, so as to enable it to benefit fully from international conventions and agreements in the area of transit transport.

8. The **representative of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States** expressed his appreciation that the consultative meeting had been organized as part of the preparatory process for the International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation to be held in Kazakhstan in 2003. He also expressed his conviction that the outcome of this meeting would bring the subregional perspective to the preparatory process.

9. The Vientiane Plan of Action was a comprehensive document providing agreement on a wide range of measures for the improvement of the transit transport system in the subregion with the support of the development partners. The consultative meeting would provide a unique opportunity for a dialogue directed towards the effective and full implementation of the above Plan of Action and support the Lao PDR in its efforts to have access to efficient and cost-effective transit transport services.

10. The **representative of UNCTAD** congratulated the Government of the Lao PDR on the holding of the Second Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao PDR and paid tribute to the country's contribution to the promotion of issues of concern to landlocked and transit developing countries at the international level. He thanked UNDP for providing financial and logistical support and both the OHRLLS and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) for their constructive cooperation in the preparation of the consultative meeting.

11. He emphasized that the problems of landlocked developing countries had been at the heart of UNCTAD from its very inception in 1964. While the establishment of a legal foundation for transit passage had been a major objective of landlocked developing countries in the past, the focus on transit had recently shifted to trade and transport facilitation.

12. UNCTAD believed that transit facilitation to overcome the landlocked disadvantage must embrace three basic elements: (a) landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours must strengthen their transit transport cooperation; (b) transit transport cooperation must be based on comprehensive and effective arrangements or agreements; and (c) the international community must provide stronger and sustained support.

13. The **representative of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific** stated that the issues facing landlocked developing countries were a high priority

for his organization. UNESCAP was making special efforts to assist Governments in the implementation of the relevant sections of the Regional Action Programme of the New Delhi Action Plan on Infrastructure Development in Asia and the Pacific (2002–2006), including those related to the Asian Highway, the Trans-Asian Railway and the facilitation measures to address the concerns of landlocked countries.

14. While UNESCAP supported efforts aimed at concluding subregional agreements on transit transport, he urged countries to avoid overlapping commitments. He expected the outcome of this meeting to feed directly into the forthcoming meeting of the UNESCAP Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries, to be held in Bangkok in April 2003, which would serve as the regional preparatory meeting for the Kazakhstan ministerial conference.

15. The **representative of the United Nations Development Programme** said that with the ever-changing external waves of regional integration and globalization, the characteristics of the Lao PDR were changing from those of a landlocked country to those of a land-linked country. In this context, it would be essential for the Lao PDR to continue to deepen its socio-economic engagement and to continue to strengthen its infrastructure networks, including transport, communication and information technologies.

16. UNDP had been supporting this initiative since the first consultative meeting held in 2000. In cooperation with other international organizations, it had been assisting the Government in tax and customs reforms, infrastructure development and preparation for entry into the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and had recently provided assistance for the preparation for accession of the Lao PDR to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE TRANSIT TRANSPORT SYSTEMS OF THE LAO PDR

17. For its consideration of the substantive items the meeting had before it an issues paper entitled “Review of the Vientiane Plan of Action – Measures designed to improve the transit transport systems of the Lao PDR” (UNCTAD/LDC/Misc.88), which had been prepared by UNCTAD consultants. UNESCAP presented a draft of a case study entitled “Transit transport issues of landlocked and transit developing countries: Case study of the Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam”.

18. The **Chairman** in his opening remarks proposed that the meeting focus on two interrelated objectives: (a) review of the current transit transport systems of the Lao PDR, including the problems faced by that country and its transit neighbours; and (b) elaboration of elements for a future programme of action that would also serve as an input to the forthcoming International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation, to be held in Kazakhstan in 2003.

19. The issues paper on transit transport systems of the Lao PDR was introduced by **Mr. Khammoune Bouaphanh and Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith**, national consultants. It analysed the current transit transport constraints facing the Lao PDR. In particular, it highlighted issues related to the Lao PDR’s external trade and issues related to transit transport systems, including road and railway infrastructure, water and air transportation and constraints arising from

non-physical barriers such as cumbersome customs and border crossing procedures and documentation, as well as issues related to the implementation of bilateral and regional road transit agreements and the need to accede to international legal instruments. The paper also raised issues related to financial and technical assistance requirements. Finally, there were proposals for future action.

20. The introduction of the issues paper stimulated an animated debate on a broad range of issues related to, *inter alia*, transit transport policy objectives, transit infrastructure development, road maintenance, government regulations and procedures, operational efficiency and external assistance requirements. The representatives of the following countries made statements: Viet Nam, the Lao PDR, Thailand and Myanmar.

21. With regard to transit transport policy objectives, the meeting emphasized the need to strengthen current bilateral road transport agreements and to accede to international transit conventions. In this context, the compatibility of regional and bilateral agreements was emphasized. In addition, the meeting discussed institutional issues and highlighted the importance of mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of transit transport agreements and arrangements. With regard to improving operational efficiency, the need to promote a more market-oriented environment for transit transport operations was stressed. Opening up the road haulage industry for competition was considered to be an important policy objective.

22. With regard to projects and programmes designed to improve transit transport infrastructure, the need to establish clear priorities was emphasized. Many participants underlined the importance of road maintenance. Delegates stressed that the existing infrastructure in the Lao PDR and some of its transit neighbours was inadequate, and that there was still a need for new investments. Issues related to navigation on the Mekong River were discussed. With respect to the improvement of the management and operational efficiency of transit transport operations, the discussion clearly indicated that there was a need for more concerted action to overcome a host of non-physical barriers through simplification and harmonization of customs procedures and administrative documentation and procedures. The meeting took note of initiatives under way to overcome non-physical barriers and stressed the need for effective implementation of agreed measures.

23. The meeting also considered that the effective implementation of agreements required appropriate institutional arrangements at the national and regional levels as well as the financial and technical support of the international community.

24. The representative of UNESCAP presented information on its recent activities in the area of transit transport. These included activities under the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project (namely, Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks) and transport facilitation (such as resolution 48/11 on international conventions, including the TIR convention, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-border Transport of Goods and People, capacity-building activities and the ASEAN multimodal agreement). It was noted that UNESCAP had some concerns regarding the proliferation of agreements and the potential danger that they could contain mutually contradictory clauses. Furthermore, it was noted that among countries in the subregion the rate of accession to the conventions included in resolution 48/11 was relatively low.

25. UNESCAP presented the draft findings of its case study on the transit transport systems of the Lao PDR through Thailand and Viet Nam and requested the meeting to validate the data and findings. The presentation first examined the main intergovernmental agreements currently in place or being discussed between Governments, namely the bilateral agreements, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit and the GMS agreement. Participants verified the information presented by UNESCAP, in particular the latest developments regarding the intergovernmental agreements and their implementation.

26. The meeting observed that while many agreements had been signed, progress in the negotiation of annexes and protocols was sometimes slow because of the complexity of the issues and the range of stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the implementation process was not always consistent with the agreements. It was suggested that greater efforts were needed by the relevant national authorities, such as customs officials, to meet with their counterparts in other countries in order to identify solutions to persistent problems.

27. The UNESCAP methodology used in the case study was explained and the findings presented. The meeting noted with interest that the majority of transit cargo to and from the Lao PDR currently moved via Thailand (Bangkok Port) because of the cheaper costs and faster transit time, among other factors.

28. Participants discussed the information presented, particularly that concerning non-transport-related costs. The meeting agreed that the modelling of costs and time on the routes helped to identify current sources of delays and costs, and that further analysis could be carried out by UNESCAP and the countries themselves.

29. After a constructive and positive discussion, the participants also agreed on general principles for inclusion in the regional platform on transit transport cooperation.

#### Action by the meeting

30. At the closing plenary, on 16 January 2003, the meeting adopted Agreed Conclusions and Recommendations (see annex I).

#### Closing statements

31. **H.E. Mr. Bonathong Vonglokham, Minister for Communication, Transport, Post and Construction of the Lao PDR**, expressed on behalf of his Government heartfelt thanks to all delegates participating in the Second Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

32. The **Chairman** of the meeting commended the spirit in which the deliberations had been conducted. In conclusion, he commended the UNCTAD secretariat, OHRLLS, UNESCAP and UNDP for their substantive and financial support.

## Chapter III

## ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

## A. Opening of the meeting

33. The meeting was opened by the representative of UNCTAD. H.E. Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR, made an opening statement. Statements were also made by representatives of the OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNESCAP and UNCTAD (see chapter I).

## B. Election of the Bureau

(Agenda item 1)

34. At its first meeting, on 15 January 2003, the following officers of the Bureau were elected:

Chairman:	H.E. Mr. Alounkeo Kittikhoun (Lao PDR)
Vice-Chairman:	Ms. Areewan Haorangsi (Thailand)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Ly Huy Tuan (Viet Nam)

## C. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

35. At its opening plenary, the meeting adopted the provisional agenda contained in document UNCTAD/LDC/Misc.90, as follows:

1. Opening session of the meeting
2. Briefing on the International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation, 28–29 August 2003, Almaty, Kazakhstan
3. Review of the Vientiane Plan of Action on measures to improve the transit system of the Lao People's Democratic Republic:
  - A. Presentation of the record review of the implementation of the Vientiane Plan of Action
    - (i) Transit transport policy issues
    - (ii) Transit transport infrastructure development
    - (iii) Improvement of management and operational efficiency
    - (iv) External assistance
    - (v) Follow-up institutional mechanisms
  - B. Presentation of the current status of the transit transport systems of the Lao PDR
4. Issues and policy recommendations for inclusion in the Regional Platform on Transit Transport Cooperation

5. Other matters

6. Adoption of the report

D. Adoption of the report of the meeting

(Agenda item 6)

36. At its closing plenary, on 16 January 2003, the participants in the meeting adopted the report of the Second Specific Consultative Meeting on Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In addition, they adopted a vote of thanks expressing their gratitude and appreciation to the Government and people of the Lao PDR for hosting the meeting and also thanked the OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNESCAP and UNDP for their assistance (see annex II).

## Annex I

**Agreed Conclusions and Recommendations****I. Overview**

1. The Second Specific Consultative Meeting on Transit Transport Systems of the Lao PDR (hereinafter referred to as the Meeting) was held in Vientiane from 15 to 16 January 2003. The Meeting reviewed the progress in implementing the Vientiane Plan of Action on Measures Designed to Improve Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which was welcomed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution 56/180 in 2001. The Meeting also served as part of the preparatory process of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation to be convened in August 2003 in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

2. The Meeting reiterated that lack of territorial access to the sea, aggravated by remoteness and isolation from world markets, high transit costs and associated risks, impose serious constraints on the overall socio-economic development efforts of landlocked developing countries. As developing nations handicapped by their geographical location, the landlocked developing countries are in a doubly disadvantaged position to take part in the globalizing world economy and international trade. In this context, the Meeting emphasized the importance of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation as the first ever global high-level event to address transit transport problems of landlocked and transit developing countries in a holistic manner.

**II. Review of the progress in the implementation of the Vientiane Plan of Action on Measures Designed to Improve Transit Transport Systems of the Lao PDR**

3. While noting progress registered in the implementation process of the Vientiane Plan of Action on Measures Designed to Improve Transit Transport Systems of the Lao PDR, the Meeting considered that greater effort was needed for its full and effective implementation.

4. The Meeting noted with satisfaction progress made in improving the legal framework at national, bilateral and subregional levels which governs transit transport operations in this subregion. In this context, the Meeting welcomed the conclusion of a number of protocols to bilateral and subregional agreements on transit transport and called upon the member States to take necessary measures to implement the those agreements and protocols.

5. The Meeting noted with concern that little progress has been made in implementing UNESCAP resolution 48/11. There is an urgent need for technical assistance for developing institutional and human capacity-building in this area. The UNESCAP is requested to provide assistance in human capacity-building in this area.

6. With regard to increasing customs transport management and operational efficiency, the Meeting invited the UNCTAD secretariat to provide assistance to the countries of the subregion in introducing modern information technologies such as ASYCUDA and ACIS. In this context donor countries are invited to provide financial support.
7. The Meeting welcomed the establishment of the Road Maintenance Fund by the Government of the Lao PDR as a major development in their effort to maintain the road network. The Meeting called on donor countries and international financial and development institutions to make contributions to the Road Maintenance Fund.
8. The Meeting noted that road transit services remain heavily regulated; therefore the Meeting called for further efforts towards liberalization of the transit services sector to stimulate competition and reduce transport costs.
9. The Meeting welcomed the opening of additional checkpoints at the border of the Lao PDR with its transit neighbours and emphasized the need for development of adequate facilities at these checkpoints.
10. The Meeting noted the need for transport facilities such as Inland Clearance Depot (ICD), Freight Distribution Center and container handling and trucking services, and called upon donor countries and international financial and development institutions to provide grants or soft loans for the construction of such facilities.
11. The Meeting underscored the need for a railway extension from Thailand to the Lao PDR in order to provide the Lao PDR with an alternative means of transport that would stimulate competition in transit transport services. Donor countries and international financial and development institutions, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are requested to consider financing such an extension.
12. The Meeting emphasized the potential role of waterway transport within transit transport systems, which could provide the opportunity to reduce costs and more effective use of the Mekong River for transportation in the GMS countries. In this regard ESCAP, UNCTAD, UNDP and others are requested to provide technical and financial assistance to develop this transport system by removing physical and non-physical barriers according to international practices.
13. The Meeting welcomed the establishment of the National Transport Committee (NTC) on 28 January 2002 and called upon the international donor community to provide financial and technical support designed to enhance its capacity.
14. The Meeting noted the effort being made to modernize Lao PDR transit and transport services and called upon the international donor community to provide greater assistance and support required to upgrade and increase the capacity of the Lao transit transport industry.
15. The Meeting underscored that non-tariff barriers in both transit and landlocked developing countries, such as customs transit procedures and border-crossing regulations, are still major obstacles for transport from and to the Lao PDR, and called upon all countries concerned to take

necessary actions to effectively implement measures agreed to under bilateral and subregional agreements.

16. The Meeting welcomed efforts by bilateral donors, particularly Australia, Belgium, China, Denmark, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Sweden and Viet Nam and international organizations such as UNESCAP, in providing technical assistance in the form of workshops, seminars, and training courses to enhance the institutional and human resources capacity-building of the Lao PDR in the fields of transport and communication during 2001–2002, and called upon all bilateral and multilateral donors to provide assistance.

17. The Meeting requested the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Conference and in close cooperation with UNCTAD and UNESCAP, to make the necessary arrangements to reflect the Vientiane Plan of Action and the outcome of the Meeting in the regional platform and the Final Outcome of the International Ministerial Conference.

18. The Meeting called upon the Governments of the subregion to actively participate at the highest possible level in the International Ministerial Conference and its preparatory process at the regional and global levels. The OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNESCAP and UNDP are requested to facilitate their participation therein.

19. The Meeting recommended the continuation of the consultative mechanism to review the progress in implementing the Vientiane Plan of Action and the outcome of the Meeting, which would constitute part of the review process and follow-up to the expected outcome of the International Ministerial Conference. The OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNESCAP and UNDP are requested to provide necessary support to the above consultative process.

### **III. Inputs to the Asian Regional Platform for the International Ministerial Conference**

20. Through extensive and very positive discussions by all participating delegations, a number of important issues and actions were identified as critical to the future development of efficient transit transport systems. It was agreed that the following issues and actions should be brought to the attention of the regional preparatory consultative meeting to be held in Bangkok (April 2003) for consideration and inclusion in the regional platform to be delivered at the International Ministerial Conference to be held in Kazakhstan in August 2003:

1. Improved coordination within and between countries:
  - a. Establishment and/or strengthening of national trade and transport facilitation committees or similar bodies which include all relevant stakeholders (government, private sector, international transport associations, etc.)
  - b. National and subregional action plans to address transit transport issues (common and agreed priorities)

- c. Identification of a mechanism for regular meetings between national trade and transport committees at subregional and/or regional levels
2. Harmonization, where necessary, of bilateral, subregional and international agreements/conventions
3. Trade and transport facilitation:
  - a. Simplification and harmonization of transit trade and transport documents
  - b. Minimization/elimination of customs inspections of goods in transit and simplification of customs formalities
  - c. Reduction of fees and charges associated with the movement of goods in transit
  - d. Establishment of a single window to facilitate the processing of documents at one location and reduce delays
  - e. Establishment of a “one-stop” shop for customs inspection and other administrative controls at border crossing points
4. Recognize the special need of landlocked countries to use their own trucks to transport transit cargo and to pick up goods in transit
5. Application of the UNESCAP cost–time model to assess, monitor and evaluate progress in transit transport routes
6. Enhancing transit infrastructure:
  - a. Financing mechanism for maintenance
  - b. Improved maintenance of road and rail
  - c. Establishment of appropriate facilities for storage and trans-shipment such as logistics facilities, Inland Container Depots and equipment
  - d. Upgrading and construction of new road and rail capacity, including completion of missing links
7. Application of information and communications technologies (ICT) to facilitate trade and transport and to upgrade efficiency of transport:
  - a. Introduction of computerized customs systems
  - b. Introduction of electronic documentation options
  - c. Introduction of transport management and monitoring systems

8. Capacity-building and training in all aspects of transit transport, such as on the accession and implementation of agreements and conventions, freight forwarding and application of information and communication technologies.

Annex II

**VOTE OF THANKS**

16 January 2003

The participants in the Second Specific Consultative meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, having met in Vientiane, Lao PDR, from 15 to 16 January 2003, expressed their gratitude to the Government and people of the Lao PDR for hosting the meeting and for the hospitality extended to them during their stay in the Lao PDR.

Also, participants expressed appreciation to the OHRLLS, UNCTAD, UNESCAP and UNDP for their assistance in the preparation and the conduct of the meeting.

## Annex III

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Mr. Dom Hong TRAN, Managing Director, Viet Nam Freight  
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## Annex IV

**CHECKLIST OF DOCUMENTS**

1. UNCTAD/LDC/Misc. 90 Provisional agenda of the Second Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao PDR
2. UNCTAD/LDC/Misc. 88 Review of the Vientiane Plan of Action – Measures designed to improve the transit transport systems of the Lao PDR
3. UNCTAD/LDC/Misc. 53 Report of the First Specific Consultative Meeting on the Transit Transport Systems of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic
4. UNESCAP Transit transport issues of landlocked and transit developing countries: Case study of the Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam