Country Statement (as delivered)
Thailand
H.E. Virasakdi Futrakul, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under Agenda item 9 (a): Inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific through regional economic cooperation and integration

ESCAP Hall, 18 May 2017, 15.30 hrs.

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. This Seventy-third Commission of ESCAP marks an auspicious time to commemorate 70 years of cooperation in economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific. My delegation is proud of contributions Thailand has made over the years, both as host country and as an active member in exchanging knowledge and experiences with other member states.

Excellencies,

2. I wish to thank the Secretariat for its report on enhancing regional economic cooperation and integration in the Asia-Pacific. The report provided an excellent overview on the Asia-Pacific’s progress and lessons learnt as well as challenges on how regional and economic cooperation and integration can support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The rising importance of the Asia-Pacific economies relative to the advanced markets of North America and Europe and the increase in protectionist trends in the traditional export markets highlight the need for an even closer economic cooperation and integration in the Asia-Pacific region.

4. This economic cooperation and integration, as rightly pointed out by the report, will present itself in terms of an integrated market, seamless connectivity both through hard and soft infrastructures and ICT, enhanced financial integration, and energy cooperation.

5. It will also need to rest on our shared responsibility for our shared vulnerabilities and risks, be they natural and man-made disasters, political and socio-economic fragility, as well as rising expectations of the expanded middle class, the poor and the marginalized.

6. No country can take on all these challenges alone. Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region therefore look to ESCAP as the largest intergovernmental
organization in the region to work together with sub-regional bodies such as ASEAN, SAARC, ACMECS, PIF, to promote complementarity and synergy and to ensure that all our deliberations conducted and resolutions adopted actually get translated into concrete action, making a real difference on the ground to our communities and peoples.

Excellencies,

7. While looking to ESCAP to serve as a regional platform to enhance further economic cooperation and integration for an inclusive and sustainable development, Thailand is also doing our part.

8. The Thai Government has prioritized the need to provide our people with better access to social and economic opportunities as well as assistance in access to justice for all.

9. The duties of the State to provide social and economic provisions are clearly outlined in the current constitution. These include reforming the tax system to ensure better income distribution, enhancing agriculture productivity and land distribution, measures to ensure a more equitable sharing of benefits from economic growth and integration for everyone, providing 15 – year free education, equipping human capital with essential skills and labour protection, improving access and quality of universal healthcare coverage, providing legal assistance to the poor or underprivileged for better access to justice.

10. We have also made good progress in formulating the 20 – Year National Strategy, which will be a roadmap for Thailand “to become a developed country with security, prosperity, and sustainability through a development approach guided by Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” whose author was our late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Four of the six frameworks under the strategy are on inclusive and sustainable economic and social development. They focus on national competitiveness, human capital, equality, and green growth development.

11. As SMEs make up more than 95 percent of Thai industry, the Government has increased support to local SMEs and cooperatives, added value to local products, allocated village funds, and promoted collaboration between communities, civil society and private sectors, to enhance the well-being of our communities across the country.

12. At present, the Thai Government, in order to modernize the Thai economy, has adopted Thailand 4.0 policy to enhance innovation and the country’s ability to benefit from ICT. The Thai Government will further strengthen our internet infrastructure to create an enabling environment for innovation and development, empower communities, and reduce inequality between urban and rural areas. To this end, 35 billion baht or about 1 billion US dollars, has been allocated to
connect broadband internet to some 40,000 villages which remain unreached by service providers, by the end of this year.

13. The Thai Government also intends to reach out to the poor and the most vulnerable through our registration scheme to assist those who are truly in need, instead of providing blanket support. Last year 17,469 million baht, or about half a billion US dollars, was provided to 7.5 million registrants through our national e-payment system. The deadline for this year’s registration was on Monday and it is expected that the number of registrants this year will be around 14 million, double that of last year.

14. In 2017, this registration scheme will seek to subsidize basic utilities and transportation for registrants. Those who live under the national poverty line of 850 US dollar per annum will get extra support to help them earn more income.

15. The Thai Government is not doing this alone. The private sector is also taking part in reducing inequality through human capital development. The Pracharath School project is an initiative under our public – private collaboration mechanism that aims to improve the quality of 7,404 schools from every sub-district in the country so that upcoming generations will be capable of shaping their own future, and contribute to national development.

16. Another example of such mechanism is the Pracharath Rak Samakkhi Provincial Company Limited. In every province, a social enterprise supported by the private sector was established to provide advisory services to local communities. Some of their early successes include connecting and training local farmers to sell their produce directly to modern trades and promoting value creation for traditional fabrics to expand the market beyond local areas.

Excellencies,

17. These developmental programmes and initiatives are based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy or SEP, a people-centred approach initiated by His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

18. The core of SEP is the principle that development must start from the people. Once members of society are strong enough, they can help strengthen communities, and subsequently the country. This is “explosion from within”. If we can apply this concept at the regional level, together we can make Asia and the Pacific more inclusive and sustainable.

19. Thailand would like to further promote South–South and Trilateral cooperation with more countries in the region under the SEP for SDGs Partnership in areas such as community development, agriculture, healthcare, water management, fisheries, and land management.
20. We have made progress as the Coordinator of ASEAN to promote complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda. A number of projects and ideas have been proposed by our partners including ESCAP, UNDP, UN Women and the World Bank.

21. Additionally, Thailand is a prime mover on Promoting Approaches to Inclusive and Sustainable Development under the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Thailand is also presently the Coordinator on Sustainable Development under the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Moreover Thailand will host the ASEM Symposium on Inter-Regional Partnership for Sustainable Development during 25 – 26 May 2017. We are also pressing ahead to enhance regional connectivity through the East-West Economic Corridor and the North-South Economic Corridor.

Excellencies,

22. Thailand has been doing what we can to promote inclusive and sustainable development at home as well as beyond our borders. However regional economic cooperation and integration has to be enhanced and strengthened further to realize inclusive growth and sustainable development for the Asia-Pacific.

23. We therefore support ESCAP’s work in promoting region-wide connectivity which we believe will help facilitate more mutually beneficial trade and shared prosperity in this region, leaving no one behind.

24. Thank you for your kind attention.