Statement by the Head of Delegation to ESCAP/U.S. Permanent Representative to ESCAP

Mr. / Madam Chair, Madam Executive Secretary, distinguished colleagues, I am honored to represent the United States of America at ESCAP.

The United States welcomes this year's theme of addressing inequality. Sustainable development, promoting equality, protecting human rights, fostering science, technology, and innovation, and improving governmental transparency are critical to address all forms of inequality. We should carefully consider the role ESCAP has to play, in particular, in addressing inequality as a serious challenge to achieving our development aspirations. The United States is dedicated to country-led, market-driven economic development that unlocks the potential of all our citizens, providing everyone with opportunities for a brighter future. This commitment is reflected in our approach to economic growth and development, as both the largest bilateral donor of development assistance and a significant private sector presence for growth in developing countries.

The United States is committed to overcoming inequality by leveraging an expanded array of new and non-traditional partners, by harnessing cutting-edge technologies, by accelerating research and development, and by scaling innovations wherever they are produced, including here in the Indo-Pacific region. Science, technology, and innovation will enable us to address health, environmental, and other development challenges that exacerbate inequality. The surest way to sustain and fully realize the potential of innovation is through a system that protects intellectual property rights. IPR is an indispensable component of well-functioning, competitive, and efficient markets that foster economic growth and secure the commercial interests of everyone.

The United States has advanced freedom, openness, peace, and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific region for the last 70 years, helping Asian economies become engines of global growth. Our commitment remains stalwart as ever. Looking forward, we believe that job creation and income opportunities will drive development, as they are essence of inclusive and equitable growth for our communities. Inequality of opportunity, a major driver of poverty, is worse than "inequality of income" because it marginalizes entire groups over time. Countries that respect human rights, minority groups, rule of law, democratic processes, and institutions will attract more investment. Human rights and economic opportunity are important for all countries, regardless of the level of economic development.

We would like to underscore the importance of achieving equality and promoting women's economic empowerment to our goals for opportunity and sustainable
development. We will achieve our objectives if we pursue them with our full societies engaged, both men and women. The United States steadfastly supports efforts to advance women’s equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and promote women and youth empowerment.

On the other hand, corruption saps economic growth, hinders development, and undermines democracy. According to the World Bank, businesses and individuals pay around $1.5 trillion (or 2% of global GDP) in bribes each year -- 10 times the value of overseas development assistance. The harm corruption causes to development is even more than the raw numbers given the detrimental impact of corruption on the poor and its drag on economic growth. We must draw on all sectors of society to fight corruption, including civil society and the private sector. This issue should be at the center of our deliberations on regional connectivity plans and projects.

The most important shift in development in this century is the private sector role in pro-poor growth and sustainability. For years the public sector saw donors, NGOs, and governments as the most important drivers of progress in the developing world. Now, leaders in both sectors are learning how to take advantage of the capabilities that of each and apply them to challenges that neither could fully take on by themselves.

The United States is collaborating, co-financing, and co-designing programs, tools, initiatives with the private sector. We are embracing the creativity and the entrepreneurship that private enterprise brings. The private sector is a driver and sustainer of development, and we know that we need to re-envision the public sector’s role accordingly.

The Asia-Pacific region has the opportunity to become a model of sustainable, inclusive development, but there are no shortcuts. We, as members of this body, can and should hold ourselves to the highest standards of quality, transparency, and inclusivity. No one country holds the answer, and no single country-sponsored program can replace meaningful national consultation on development goals and transparency in use of scarce resources.

While we have made remarkable progress toward alleviating poverty and fostering development to address inequality, we still have a long way to go. We look forward to working with ESCAP, the private sector, and civil society such as grassroots organizations, academia, faith-based and philanthropic organizations, to provide opportunities for all.