UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Country Statement by Brunei Darussalam
Bismillahir Rahmaanir Rahiim.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and a very good morning/afternoon.

Chairman,
Excellencies,
Madam Executive Secretary of United Nations ESCAP,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Brunei Darussalam delegation, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincerest appreciation to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission in Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) and the Royal Thai Government for the hospitality extended to us during the 74th Session of the Commission.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The theme “Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which highlights the importance of reducing inequality of both income and opportunities, is timely and relevant, considering countries in the region are busily engaged in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve the 2030 Agenda. There is unanimous agreement that economic growth by itself is not sufficient to reduce poverty if the growth is not inclusive and does not involve the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and
environmental. With regards to the social aspect of development, policies should be inclusive, with an extra emphasis on the disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

For Brunei Darussalam, efforts to address inequality are spearheaded by various ministries such as the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. Noting that policies should be inclusive in principle, Brunei Darussalam has taken heed of this call by taking proactive measures especially in the area of its citizens’ well-being, health and education.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Global income inequality is on the rise; the richest 10 per cent earns up to 40 per cent of the total global income. This rising inequality compels for national policies to empower the lowest income earners as well as to promote the economic inclusion for all strata of society, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity.

In addressing income inequality, Brunei’s National Council of Social Issues continues to ensure that the existing Special Committee on Poverty Issues coordinates with relevant government and non-government agencies in the implementation of efforts towards eradicating poverty through an integrated Action Plan on Poverty Issues. Poverty management initiatives include assistance, both financial and non-financial, to low income families, provided by various ministries and agencies.
In providing social protection for the elderly and disabled, the Old Age and Disability Pensions Act (Cap 18), which came into force in 1955, provides for pecuniary payments by way of old age pensions (citizens and residents upon reaching 60 years old regardless of the economic status and gender) as well as monthly allowances for persons aged 15 and above with disabilities. To provide additional protection for the disadvantaged, with effect from January 2018, Brunei Darussalam extended the eligibility for recipients of the disability allowance under the Old Age and Disability Pensions Act to include children with disabilities aged below 15 years. As additional protection for the elderly, the government has introduced the Employees Trust Fund. These provisions are designed as a means to protect these vulnerable groups from poverty.

In addition to Brunei Darussalam’s commitment to protect persons with disabilities, on 14 April 2016, Brunei Darussalam officially ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is currently being integrated into the Brunei National Vision 2035 (Wawasan Brunei 2035).

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are all aware that inequality does not simply apply only to income. Inequality occurs in a variety of ways, one of which is health. 99 per cent of maternal deaths occur in developing countries which primarily reflects inequalities in health care access. Further, there exist large disparities between countries, as well as within countries, such as between rural and urban areas.
Health policies should ensure accessibility to health care for all, so that good health is not just a privilege of the wealthy. In line with Goal 3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, universal health coverage continues to be the cornerstone of Brunei Darussalam’s health policy. This is in line with the strong recognition of health care as one of the major public investments in human development and that by generating healthy and productive citizens, they in turn will contribute to the dynamic and sustainable socio-economic development, as well as peace and social security, of a country.

Over the last decade, health in Brunei Darussalam has improved significantly as measured by a number of internationally recognised health metrics such as annual increases in life expectancy; early achievement of the United Nations health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); elimination of communicable diseases of public health concern such as malaria, measles and polio; and increases in the number of local doctors, specialists and other allied health professionals. Over the last few years, Brunei Darussalam has strategically positioned health centres all over the country, to ensure a wider reach to its citizens. For a small number of remote areas not accessible by road, primary health care is provided through the Travelling Clinic and Flying Medical services.

Brunei’s Darussalam’s efforts towards improving accessibility of health care is evidenced by its results. In 2016, the country recorded zero maternal deaths, compared to 2 maternal deaths recorded in 2015. Further, as of 2016, 100 per cent
of births were attended to by skilled health personnel. Brunei Darussalam recorded an under-5 mortality rate of 10.4 per 1,000 live births and a neonatal mortality rate of 4.8 per 1,000 live births, both of which are within the Sustainable Development Goals targets of reducing neonatal mortality rate to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality rate to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

To ensure equality of opportunity so that access to education is not determined by their socio-economic backgrounds, education policies should provide for universal access to learning, to allow children from disadvantaged backgrounds to climb up the so called socio-economic ladder. In confirming its commitment to equality of opportunity, Brunei Darussalam has always prioritised universal access to education for all, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity. All children are provided free and compulsory basic education for the 12 years, from 1 year in pre-school up to secondary school or vocation and technical education. In providing inclusive quality education for all, the Special Education Policy provides the framework for the development of the education system, which serves the needs of all children, including those with diverse learning needs.

As of 2016, Brunei Darussalam recorded a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in primary education of 105.22 per cent while the GER in secondary education was recorded at 98.54 per cent.
To further ensure equal access to further education, education scholarships are provided by various government as well as private agencies to local students interested to pursue higher learning locally or overseas, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity. In 2014, the government introduced an education loan facility with a repayment period of not more than 30 years, with payments to begin upon employment. As a further indication of the government’s dedication to ensuring quality education for all, students who obtain a Bachelor’s Degree with First Class Honours are offered to convert their loan facility into an education scholarship, whereby the students will not be required to pay back their loan.

In terms of gender inequalities, Brunei Darussalam is on track to achieve 100 per cent gender equality at all levels of education. The number of females enrolled at Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary, Post-Secondary as well as Vocational and Technical levels are almost equal to males. At the Pre-University and tertiary level, female students tend to outnumber male students; as of 2016, females accounted for approximately 60 per cent of students enrolled in higher education.

As of 2014, females accounted for 48.6% of the workforce, and includes women in high-ranking posts, such as Ambassador-at-Large, Attorney General (with ministerial rank), Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Permanent Secretaries, Chief Executive Officers and Directors in both public and private sectors.
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognising that the 2030 Agenda requires multilateral approaches, both at the regional and global scale, to address inequalities, we believe that ESCAP continues to play an important role for "Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" through its greater emphasis on promoting higher, well-balanced and sustainable growth in the region to help eradicate poverty and generate employment opportunities.

Brunei Darussalam joins the global community in addressing rising inequalities in income, access, opportunities and resources. Therefore, we encourage and support the Commission’s continuous hard work in sustainable development. Finally, we commend the Commission’s ongoing endeavours in this important development agenda to ensure no one gets left behind.

Thank you.

Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakaatuh.

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