ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

74\textsuperscript{th} SESSION

Inequality in the Era of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Statement by Director of the Macao Economic Bureau
Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region

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Bangkok, Thailand 15 May 2018
Chairperson,
Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, Madame Shamshad Akhtar,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of Macao, China, we are delighted to participate in the 74th Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. We would like to congratulate Your Excellency on your election as the Chairperson. Also, we would like to thank the ESCAP Secretariat for the excellent preparation for this meeting, and the Thai Government for the warm hospitality extended to all participants.

In times like the era that we are in, when knowledge no longer holds in the hands of a few and information bears no boundary, equality is essentially the essence of government policies that brings true prosperity to society. Against a period of rapid economic growth of the Macao economy, with the GDP sprang from 108 billion patacas in 2000 to 392 billion patacas in 2017, the MSAR Government puts untiring efforts to ameliorate policies in order to deliver a sense of acquisition to everyone in society, which coincides with the pledge of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that “leaves no one behind”.

In tandem with this policy goal, measures taken by the MSAR Government stretch over all sectors to cater for the needs of different groups of society. Among those measures are as follows:

**Education**

Education is not only the fundamental for building a knowledge economy, but also an intrinsic means for individuals to climb up the social ladder in society that upholds the doctrine of equality among people from different ethnic groups. To safeguard the right of every Macao resident to receive regular education, the MSAR Government has implemented 15-year free education since 2007, which stretches across kindergarten, primary to secondary education. Parents are obliged to, and have the freedom to
choose a school for their children that has either fallen in or outside the free education net of the MSAR Government. To further guarantee that no sundry expenses will constitute a burden for parents in sending their children to school, the MSAR Government distributes “Textbook Subsidies” to all kindergarten, primary, secondary and university students, while “Tuition Subsidies” are distributed to students who have financial difficulties in their families.

As we are all aware that the world nowadays changes in the blink of an eye, lifelong learning is an indispensable supplement to regular education for people working in all sectors of the economy. Thus, the MSAR Government promotes lifelong learning by providing subsidies to Macao residents above 15 years old to attend training courses offered by local education institutions approved by the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau.

**Medical Service**

At the public health level, the MSAR Government strives to expand the medical service provided for elders, women and children. In this regard, a Medical Centre for Dementia was set up to strengthen the health management system of the elders and promote a Dementia-friendly environment across the city. In helping children with congenital development disabilities, the Government established an Integrated Assessment Centre and a Rehabilitation and Medical Centre for Children to provide the necessary early diagnosis and follow-up medical service for children with special needs. To promote breast-feeding, the Government works to improve the environment of the breast-feeding rooms located in medical centres and urges private organizations to make room for this facility especially in the shopping centres.

At the private level, the MSAR Government distributes 600 patacas medical coupon to every permanent resident for consulting medical service provided by private clinics at their own discretion.
Social Security System
The Social Security System of Macao is composed of two tiers. The first tier was implemented in 2011 while the second tier was implemented since January this year. The Law stipulates that the MSAR Government shall inject an initial amount of 10,000 patacas to every new account. Other than voluntary or compulsory contributions from individuals or registered employees and employers, the Government also consider special allocation to every account in times of budget surplus, whilst the amount being allocated this year is 7,000 patacas.

Upon the completion of the Social Security System, the MSAR Government can now make use of the system to disseminate “Pension for the Elders”, “Less-abled Subsidies”, “Unemployment Allowances”, “Burial Grants”, “Marriage Grants” and so on. Above all, the objective of setting up the Social Security System is to recognize the contribution of the elders, who have contributed to the society in their younger days, with a well-functioned social security net.

Allowances for the Less Privileged
The specific needs of the less privileged residents are always borne in the mind of the MSAR Government in formulating social welfare policies. Families with special needs and living below the subsistence level are eligible to apply for, namely, “Subsidies for Learning Activities”, “Medical Care Subsidies”, “Less-abled Subsidies”, “Short-term Food Allowance”, plus a “Special Living Allowance”. Other than easing their financial difficulties, the intention behind distributing these allowances is to integrate care with self-improvement, assistance with poverty alleviation, conspicuously leaving no one behind regardless of the state of life that they are currently in.

Economic Development
Against the background of providing all these social measures, the MSAR Government takes a proactive approach in economic development. We are glad to say that the Macao economy has resumed its growth momentum and ended the three years of economic downturn in 2017. Both the unemployment rate and inflation rate maintain
at a modest level; the financial status and fiscal reserve system are resilient. Aside from consolidating the current economic accomplishment, the SAR Government also strives for exploring new growth impetus. The policy objectives of the SAR Government are to integrate into the general development strategies of Mainland China as well as to carry out the Five-year Development Plan of Macao.

**Economic Cooperation**
Under the auspices of the Central Government, our priority with respect to economic cooperation is to actively integrate into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area Development Plan. One of the major breakthroughs that will be brought forward by the development of the Bay Area is the innovative flow of people, goods, capital and information between Macao and other cities in the Bay Area, which shall offer greater business opportunities to Macao enterprises. Another pilot project of Mainland China that Macao will be engaged in is the “Belt and Road” Initiative, which meant to connect all participating economies and foster intra-cooperation that help bolster economic development.

**Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2020) of Macao**
At the domestic level, the MSAR Government promulgated the Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2020) of Macao in September 2016. The principal strategic aim of the Plan is to transform Macao into a world centre of tourism and leisure and a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries (collectively known as the “Centre and Platform” policies).

In realizing the goal of “Centre and Platform” policies, the MSAR Government endeavours to turn Macao into a city with ideal living, working, commuting, travelling and leisure conditions. The seven major goals in this connection are, namely, to attain steady economic growth; to further optimize the industrial structure; to configure a travel and leisure ecology; to continuously uplift the quality of living; to sustain culture and education development; to notably foster environmental protection; to further enhance government administration and to keep strengthening the rule of law in the economy. Under these seven goals, 22 targets and 54 assessment criterions have been
devised for all government bureaux to observe and follow.

Since the adoption of the Development Plan in 2016, the fulfilment rate has reached 80% in 2017. With the unequivocal support from all bureaux, the MSAR Government is confident that this satisfactory performance could be maintained in the coming years.

**Supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises**
The MSAR Government attaches great importance to the development of SMEs in Macao. The two-pronged approach that the SAR Government is rendering to SMEs in Macao includes the expansion of business in the local market as well as the extension to the Mainland and international market. Other than the various SMEs support programs, the MSAR Government also encourages the local businesses to participate in the overseas trade promotion shows organized by the government or non-profit organizations to sell their products in the overseas market.

**Conclusion**
Other than citing a set of goals for governments to meet, the 2030 Agenda also reminds policy makers that it is equality that makes our place a home to live, which is also the goal of the MSAR Government, i.e. making Macao a home for our residents to pursue their dreams and live their lives.

Thank you.