Fellow Heads of States and Governments,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the 77th Session of the ESCAP. I extend Afghanistan’s gratitude to Her Excellency Alisjahbana for her leadership at this critical time for our region and the world.

The theme of this year’s session is timely and urgent. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and exposed structural inequalities in our global systems. We must muster a true sense of urgency to address the interrelated challenges of social protection, stimulation of sustainable recovery, strengthening of connectivity and supply chains, and focusing on climate change. It is imperative that we build back better, greener, and more equal, robust, and connected, including by ensuring universal and equitable access to vaccines as a global public good. If we fail, the 2030 Agenda will be beyond reach.

A key lesson from the pandemic has been the centrality of regional connectivity and integration in enabling us to manage turbulence and promote recovery.

Without the solidarity of our neighbors and the generous support of the region, Afghanistan, as a Landlocked Developing Country, the scale and scope of the adverse impacts of the pandemic would have been greater than expected. I further take this opportunity to extend special thanks to ADB, EU, the World Bank and our bilateral donors for their support in response to and recovery from the pandemic. I also wish to recognize India’s and COVAX’s transfer of vaccines to Afghanistan.

By pursuing regional sustainable infrastructure investments, we hope to integrate the region further and create more efficient and effective supply chains.

We are investing in our people and expanding social protection systems to all Afghans to eradicate poverty and promote growth. We are pursuing climate change adaptation and resilience programs and taking decisive steps to protect our natural environment. We are also investing in the future through greater digitalization and the promotion of education.

These efforts and their effects were recently presented in Afghanistan’s report on the Implementation of the Istanbul Program of Action. We are additionally pursuing further analysis of the implementation of the SDGs in Afghanistan in preparation for our presentation of Afghanistan’s second Voluntary National Review at the High-Level Political Forum this year.

Our efforts are dependent on the continued support of the region and the close cooperation of all partners. It is also dependent on peace. Armed conflict is inflicting a huge toll on our lives and livelihoods, with the economic damage inflicted in 2019 alone estimated at 18.6% of the
GDP. The cost of the conflict between 1978 and 2001, alone, has been estimated at over $240 billion dollars by the World Bank. Peace, therefore, is a national imperative.

The Government of Afghanistan is committed to an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, inclusive peace process and to a political settlement that maintains a sovereign, united, democratic, neutral and connected Afghanistan where all Afghans feel protected, respected and included in the decision-making process.

While the risks of failure in bringing a meaningful peace to Afghanistan can be catastrophic, not just for Afghanistan but for the entire region, success in Afghanistan will lend itself to a new era of regional cooperation at a time when regional challenges, from terrorism and extremism to natural disasters, from COVID-19 pandemic to environmental challenges to persistent poverty, all require collective action.

To achieve our collective goals, we must accelerate the reform of the United Nations. Mid-20th century assumptions and governance models cannot respond to the urgent challenges of 2021. Afghanistan is ready to pioneer approaches to stakeholder governance and stakeholder economic development that would result in integration of systems of state-building, market-building, peace-building, and regional connectivity and prosperity.

Thank you.