77th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

“Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific”

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and People of Kiribati, I am very delighted and honoured to address you all in this video statement, let me greet you warmly:

And in His Holy Name: Kam na bane ni mauri!

**Acknowledgement**

The fact that we have delegations joining this 77th Session of ESCAP (in-person) and (virtually) clearly demonstrates the challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and our resolve to persevere, and “build back better from crises through regional cooperation”.

**Defining the theme and its application in the national context**

The theme for this Session cannot be more pertinent, asking the question of how governments, communities, families and individuals can work alongside one another to address and overcome terrible afflictions plaguing our communities.

These are difficult and uncertain times, which calls for stronger cooperation and reminds us of the strength we have in unity, **to build back from crises through regional cooperation**.

**Updates on current activities in line with the theme**

**Financing Climate Resilience**

In order for us to help our neighbours and contribute during times of crises, we need first to address our own issues at home. One of our most prominent issues is the
adverse effects of Climate Change on our daily lives. I am thankful for the support we continue to receive from our partners which have assisted us in our tireless work to build resilience against Climate Change impacts and relieve pressure on our scarce and limited financial resources.

**Strategic Expenditure Focus**

Our national budget for 2021 was delivered to Parliament in December 2020, with a key focus on “embracing the new normal”. Accordingly, and in line with our theme for this 77th Session, my government acknowledges the importance of regional cooperation with our ESCAP Family and many budget priorities have been allocated to focus on “building back” and “recovering” by investing and leveraging strategic partnerships to ensure protection of the most vulnerable including safeguarding our development progress during these challenging times.

**COVID-19 updates: Repatriation and Vaccine**

Although Kiribati remains COVID-free, it is not without its challenges. Since the closure of our borders in March 2020, countless of Kiribati nationals have been effectively stranded in foreign countries. Until October 2020, we have been unable to repatriate our stranded nationals due to limited resources to establish proper quarantine centres. But since then, and with the support of our partners, we have successfully managed to upgrade and utilize some of our pre-existing buildings deemed appropriate for quarantine measures and begun the repatriation process. And I am pleased to share that more than 70% have been safely reunited with their families.

**Closing Remarks**

I wish to reiterate our continued trust in our ESCAP family to lead our region to a more prosperous and sustainable future. Kiribati believes in the spirit of unity, fellowship and helping one another in times of great need. We are always ready to offer and contribute however little or insignificant it may be.

I wish to conclude my remarks by bestowing upon us all the Kiribati traditional blessings of Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa which means Health, Peace and Prosperity.