Introduction

Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greetings from the Republic of the Marshall Islands. It is my pleasure to join you all here today for this 77th Session of the Commission to ESCAP.

Excellencies, it is renowned that the COVID-19 pandemic has created one of the worst catastrophes in Asia and the Pacific since World War II. While the RMI and many of our friends in the Pacific have been fortunate to stay COVID free, we empathize with the rest of our neighbors in the region and the world who have been drastically impacted.

We have all experienced the impacts of the pandemic in one way or another. We have all experienced the elements of the sudden economic downfall, including constraints in the trading sector and the hardships in the Tourism Industry. In the Marshall Islands, shutting down our borders and imposing strict restrictions has severely impacted our supply chains and our primary economic engine of fisheries and caused a near halt to air travel.

But through our experiences we were able to identify the weaknesses in our existing systems specifically in health, societies, digital connectivity and environment. In addressing these critical areas, the RMI government has taken actions in reforming and adapting new policies to minimize the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

Excellencies, now is the opportunity to rethink and identify more effective approaches in our development goals as we “Build Back Better.” In order to do this multilateral institutions and regional cooperation must be strengthened.
The Marshall Islands commends ESCAP for the current reforms undertaken to ensure more effective and adequate support to countries. We are also grateful for the continued support to Asia and the Pacific, and particularly in our pursuit to achieving the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. We, therefore, look forward to continuing to work collaboratively in delivering tangible results in this endeavour.

In this regard, the UN system needs to assure that island-tailored solutions play an important role in regional assistance, including through meaningful implementation of the UN’s SAMOA Pathway for SIDS. As we transition into a new Multi-Country UN Office in the North Pacific islands sub-region, it is vital that “one size fits all” approaches are avoided when they fail to address our unique scale, and that there is greater coherence between national circumstances and wider strategies.

In order to ensure sustainability of current policy responses to COVID-19, we need adaptive solutions that sustain us in the longer term. For a low-lying island nation, that means better access to financing and adaptive capacity building.

The Marshall Islands still continues to recognize the need for strengthened regional cooperation and coordination with development partners for recovery to be prompt and effective. But while we pursue wider regional action, the international system must continue to adjust for our island sub-region in specific deliverable programming approaches, not just in spirit or good intention. It is the smallest and poorest among us who may face the greatest challenges in this pandemic, and in our pursuit to build back better we must remember that no island is left behind.

Excellencies, the Marshall Islands is keen on strengthening this subregional mechanism for improved coordination and utilizing it to progress the region’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda in building back better.

Kommoool Tata.