Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the Expert Group Meeting on First and Last Mile Access to Public Transport in Asia and the Pacific.

The Maldives is a small nation with a population of just 520,000 residents, primarily concentrated in our capital, Malé. Connectivity to other countries is crucial to our economy, but the connectivity within and between our islands is equally important.

Ensuring access to public transport, for example, is vital for providing everyone with equal access to economic opportunities and freedoms. Transport is key to propelling sustainable development.

According to UN-Habitat, 98% of the population in Malé has convenient access to public transport. However, behind this statistic there are still commuting challenges present. Heavy congestion and frequent road traffic accidents are common in Malé.

An efficient and well-adopted public transport system can significantly alleviate these issues by reducing traffic on our roads and stimulate economic growth by enhancing connectivity across different regions of the country.

However, there are unique challenges in developing a cohesive public transport system in the Maldives. Geographic barriers make it difficult to create an efficient network. Our dispersed population adds to these challenges, requiring meticulous planning and resource allocation.

The first and last-mile access to public transport influences the ease of how commuters can use public transport systems and is key to public transport adoption. Convenient and inclusive first and last-mile access can help to increase public transport use, which helps with congestion and pollution.

Given the importance of this topic, there is still more progress that needs to be made. The Asia-Pacific region is performing below the global average for access to public transport, with a regional average of just 44%.
For each country in our region, first- and last-mile access to public transport will look slightly different. Challenges can range from socio-economic inequalities to financing for public transport to road safety. What can unite us is the shared understanding of the importance of accessibility and the ambition to improve access. I believe it is what brings us here together today.

With challenges come opportunities. The interconnectedness of first and last-mile access with broader sustainable transport objectives, such as electric mobility and road safety, highlights its role in advancing sustainable and inclusive transport systems.

Ensuring that public transport is accessible to all is essential for improving the appeal, safety, and wider usage of public transport. Moreover, positioning first and last-mile access with emerging transport priorities can help to unlock financing for this issue.

I commend ESCAP’s efforts to support member states in advancing this crucial topic. The Regional Action Programme on Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific for 2022 to 2026 already emphasized the importance of first and last-mile access as a key issue in urban transport. It is my sincere hope that the Expert Group Meeting today can help to take this discussion further.

I hope that we can work on developing sustainable transport systems that support economic and social development, ensuring that no one is left behind.

I look forward to the insights of today’s speakers and thank you for your attention.