Madam Executive Secretary,
Chairperson,
Excellencies,

Ayobowan!

I am pleased to be able to address you at the 77th Session of UNESCAP. Despite the current challenges, it is very important for us to gather at this forum. This year’s theme is significant and timely as we work on strategies to overcome this pandemic, and start rebuilding our economies and societies.

Sri Lanka has made remarkable progress in controlling the spread of COVID-19, recording a very low death rate and a high recovery rate through case detection, contact tracing, quarantining and patient treatment. Sri Lanka’s robust public healthcare system provided free access to health and helped control the pandemic. The Government also repatriated nearly 100,000 Sri Lankans and started our vaccination program in February.

Even during the pandemic, economic activities continued in several sectors. The export sector continued to function, and tourism restarted in January. The Central Bank reduced policy rates and implemented several concessionary refinancing programs.

Excellencies,

Our Government is deeply committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. For this purpose, an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee on Sustainable Development has been formed under my leadership. Our youth are also an important component of our development agenda. That is why decade 2021 to 2030 has been declared the Decade of Skills Development in our country.

We are also keen on strengthening our regional ties and emphasize the need to accelerate the “South-South” cooperation. Towards that end, we believe UNESCAP should commit itself to being relevant and responsive with measures such as

• Assisting small countries with pandemic recovery and vaccination programs.
• Encouraging growth of foreign employment opportunities.
• Promoting Eco-tourism and Health-tourism
• And
• Encouraging investments into and find markets for emerging nations.
In conclusion, let me state that we deeply appreciate the timely efforts taken by UNESCAP to bring the Member States together for a constructive and interactive regional discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic.

I wish your forthcoming sessions, every success.

Thank you.