Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the 77th Session of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The theme of the session, ‘Building Back Better’, is timely. Not since the founding of the UN has the entire planet faced such an obstacle as COVID-19. Not since then, have we had an opportunity to completely and fundamentally change the patterns and systems that our world runs upon.

For all its tragedy, COVID-19 must also be recognized for the opportunity that it is. We have before us unparalleled levels of political and public will, coupled with the availability of incredible resources. There has never been a better time for change, to build a world that is safer, more resilient, sustainable, greener and more equitable.

In doing so, we must follow the goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, which offer us a blueprint for a sustainable recovery. By working together, we can turn what has been a global setback into a springboard to a better future.

Asia-Pacific is an economic powerhouse, abundant in resources, skills, and knowledge. These capacities must be tapped into and coordinated to strengthen the region. A build back better approach can simultaneously support pandemic recovery, and in the process address pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as rapid urbanization, poverty, or environmental degradation.

Excellencies,

The actions we take as we emerge from this pandemic will define generations to come. This can be the moment that we pivot away from
inequality, instability, and unsustainability, and build a world with the foundation to persevere and thrive.

Such a monumental undertaking requires a whole-of-society approach and the multilateral system, including regional commissions, such as ESCAP, must be at the heart of this.

I call on all leaders, including those of ESCAP, to champion a sustainable development green approach, to build back better from the pandemic.

Our collective action has the potential to lay the foundation for long-term cooperation and for a future that offers more opportunity, more equality, more security and more prosperity. Let us embrace this. I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

Thank you.