Agenda Item 3: Regional Cooperation for Resilient and Sustainable Urban Development in Asia and the Pacific

• Honourable Chair, Your Excellencies, Esteemed Delegates, and Distinguished Guests,

• Kia orana and warm greetings to all.

• The Cook Islands is determined to contribute to this important discussion on regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development. As a small island developing state, we face unique urbanization challenges, with 80% of our 17,000 people concentrated on our main island of Rarotonga. This rapid urban growth strains our infrastructure, heightens climate vulnerabilities, and risks cultural erosion in our outer islands. Yet, we see urbanization as an opportunity to build a sustainable, inclusive future through regional collaboration.

• Our Population Policy guides balanced development, enhancing our mainland's resilience while revitalizing our Outer Islands, our Pa Enua. We are investing in climate-ready infrastructure—such as upgraded water systems and coastal protections—to safeguard urban areas against sea-level rise. Digital innovation, aligned with our National Digital Strategy, is transforming our country into a connected hub. E-governance platforms improve service delivery, and smart technologies monitor urban environmental impacts, ensuring sustainability.

• However, our small scale and isolation limit resources for urban planning and smart city solutions. Regional cooperation is essential to overcome these barriers. Through ESCAP and Pacific partnerships, we seek technical assistance to develop urban-specific digital tools, like smart waste management systems, and to share best practices for climate-resilient urban design. We also advocate for innovative financing to fund sustainable infrastructure, ensuring that we thrive as an economic and cultural center.

• Inclusion remains our priority. Our urban policies empower women, youth, and outer island communities, preserving our Cook Islands Maori identity. Initiatives like digital education platforms in our native language ensure cultural continuity amidst urban growth. These efforts align with the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, positioning our country as a model for small island urban resilience.

• We are inspired by the Asia-Pacific's collective vision. The Cook Islands calls for strengthened regional frameworks to support SIDS in urban planning, climate adaptation, and digital transformation. By pooling expertise and resources, we can create cities that are resilient, equitable, and sustainable.

• In the spirit of our ancestors, who built thriving communities with ingenuity and unity, we pledge to work alongside our regional partners. Let us harness regional cooperation to shape urban futures that honor our communities, safeguard our environment, and serve as models of sustainable development.

• Meitaki maata, kia orana, e kia manuia.