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Opening Remarks

**Agenda item 2(b): Subregional Cooperation to Advance Sustainable
Development in Asia and the Pacific**
78th Session of ESCAP
Wednesday, 25 May 2022, 10:00 – 12:00 (Bangkok time)

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the session on “***Subregional cooperation to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific***,” with the participation of **nine** intergovernmental and multisectoral organizations in Asia and the Pacific.

Today, given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic-induced socio-economic crisis, climate change and disaster risks, and geopolitical tensions, we must come together across all subregions in Asia and the Pacific.

For example, at the current rate, none of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be achieved in any of the five subregions by 2030.

According to ***Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022***, almost all ESCAP member States have seen slow progress towards achieving the SDGs.

In particular, over the past two years, due to COVID-19 pandemic-related border closures across all the subregions, we are witnessing severe disruptions in the regional supply chains and trade and investment related inter-regional connectivity and linkages.

The triple crises have further exacerbated health care infrastructure and social protection systems across all of our five subregions in Asia and the Pacific.

In this context, this dialogue provides another unique opportunity for us to underscore the significance of regional and subregional cooperation and partnerships.

As my distinguished colleagues recognize, our dialogue will be looking forward to discussing a set of solution-oriented approaches to promote shared development

goals and complementary initiatives and harness cross-subregional cooperation for the benefit of the people and the planet in this region.

From the Asia-Pacific regional lens, subregional processes and organizations must shape collective action within the subregional contexts.

To put multilateralism into a reality, subregional cooperation must be at the centre of our approach and partnership modality.

Excellencies,

I am pleased to inform you that ESCAP has been continuously strengthening cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, holding to the principles of networked and inclusive multilateralism.

Please allow me to highlight a few selected initiatives over the past year.

In the **Pacific**, ESCAP has strengthened its collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Community (SPC) and other Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies on a few Pacific priorities, including National Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Tracker.

Recently, to explore options for debt relief or debt restructuring, ESCAP and PIFS co-hosted the Pacific Regional Debt Conference in April 2022.

The work on developing a regional framework on climate mobility with PIFS and other UN partners has been noteworthy, along with the substantive monitoring and progress assessment through the upcoming 2022 quadrennial report on Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development and SAMOA Pathway.

In **East and North-East Asia**, ESCAP has partnered with the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) to focus on climate action by holding a Carbon Neutrality Forum in November 2021.

ESCAP also has built an effective partnership with the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) to promote connectivity and sustainable development in North-East Asia, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination on trade, transport and energy.

In **North and Central Asia**, ESCAP collaborates with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries.

These continued partnerships have been focusing on the thematic issues related to trade and transport connectivity, energy efficiency and transition, economic transformation and diversification, as well as statistics and digitalization.

More importantly, jointly with UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), ESCAP also supports the UN Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), focusing on pandemic recovery strategies, transport and trade harmonization, and science and technology and innovations.

In **South and South-West Asia**, ESCAP works closely with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) to strengthen their contributions and role in UN meetings, especially in the South Asia Forum for Sustainable Development for shaping the subregional perspective.

Building capacity of women entrepreneurs, disaster risk reduction, climate change, and cross border connectivity are other areas where SAARC and BIMSTEC are engaged with ESCAP. We are also supporting the Gender Policy Advisory Group of SAARC.

In **South-East Asia**, cooperation is strong and dynamic with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN-UN Plan of Action 2021-2025 provides a solid foundation to scale up collaboration and respond to the socio-cultural opportunities and challenges of ASEAN.

The Plan of Action identifies an actionable framework for both the UN and ASEAN to develop joint programmes and activities in the areas of social protection, connectivity in trade, transport and energy, as well as the environment and climate action, including disaster risk reduction.

The Plan serves as a key planning document for UN entities to deliver on joint actions on the ground for people, the planet and prosperity. By forging a strong regional development partnership, our collaborative work continues to show tangible results.

Excellencies,

Regular engagement with subregional organizations is key to informing and ensuring that our common agenda on sustainable development responds to the challenges and opportunities distinct to each of the subregions.

Through these vibrant engagements and initiatives, we should be more efficient in sharing our knowledge, promoting best practices, providing technical assistance, and building synergies across areas of common interest, especially to advance national strategies and policies.

By reviewing our engagements and collaboration modalities, subregional programmes must focus on health care and social protection systems, economic transformation and sustainable financing, trade and investments facilitation, digital economy, and climate action and energy transition, including net-zero emission targets.

Finally, we need to leverage ESCAP's Regional Institutes to facilitate and support capacity-building programmes in areas related to data and statistics, ICT and technology transfer, agricultural mechanizations and disaster information management in partnership with these organizations and all stakeholders.

Excellencies,

I am committed to this continued engagement with and among subregional organizations, including through the Commission session, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and the multistakeholder SDG subregional forums.

I recognize the significant role of this process to strengthen and advance Our Common Agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

I look forward to listening to your recommendation.

Thank you.