Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Opening remarks (as prepared for delivery)

Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

Wednesday, 15 November 2023
09:00 – 09:45 hrs.
Venue: (CR-1)

Excellency, Varawut Silpa-Archa, Minister of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand,

Diene Keita, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, UNFPA,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, friends and colleagues from civil society, youth organizations and the UN system,

I am honoured to welcome you to the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference.

Let me express our gratitude to the Royal Thai Government and to His Excellency, the Minister of Social Development and Human Security, for joining us today.

As our host Government, Thailand has achieved much in the field of population and development. We look forward to learning more about Thailand’s experience.
This gathering is a testament to our collective resolve to address the demographic dynamics of our region with the vision and determination to place people at the centre of sustainable development.

We convene our meeting at a pivotal moment.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the first Asian Population Conference, the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the critical mid-point for achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our region, home to 60 per cent of the global population, has been at the forefront of significant demographic changes. Since the first Population Conference in New Delhi in 1963, most countries have transitioned from high to low fertility and mortality, coupled with increased migration and more people living in urban areas.

These changes have occurred due to increased socioeconomic development and people gaining greater agency. Consequently, population age structures are changing, and populations are ageing rapidly.

These changes are a cause for celebration, but societies need to better prepare for this transition.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We have made commendable progress, yet much remains to be done.

We celebrate the reduction of extreme poverty and increased life expectancy to 75 years across the region; at the same time, the working-age population
has started to decline in several countries. We must develop forward-looking policies, innovative labour market strategies and propose intergenerational solutions.

With regard to health care, we have succeeded in improving longevity but we must make it accessible and affordable for all.

We must also strive for greater gender equality, as women’s limited participation in the workforce and politics, coupled with violence against them, remain significant challenges.

Educational attainment has increased, yet the COVID-19 pandemic has left deep marks on our youth. Young people are, on average, three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. This can lead to a potential generational crisis if not effectively addressed.

Meanwhile, due to climate change and environmental degradation, people have lost their lives and have been displaced. Economies have suffered, with an estimated annual loss of $924 billion.

We must enhance our environmental resilience, with people, especially those in vulnerable situations, at the centre.

**Distinguished participants,**

Despite these challenges, the ICPD Programme of Action adopted in 1994 and the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, adopted in 2013, remain our guiding documents, with their forward-looking and rights-based approach.
In the spirit of both documents, we must foster continued collaboration, leverage the SDG monitoring framework, support member States in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies, and strengthen our partnerships with civil society organizations.

We must carry forward our collective commitments to the 57th session of the Commission on Population and Development in 2024, where Member States will conduct the 30-year review of the ICPD Programme of Action.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

Over the next three days, let us focus not only on the strides we have made, but also on persistent and emerging gaps and challenges. Our discussions should pave the way for innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Let us invest in data, statistics and capacity-building to illuminate the path toward achieving our shared 2030 Agenda.

Let us pledge to bridge disparities, strengthen resilience and secure a prosperous, inclusive, equitable and sustainable future for all people of Asia and the Pacific.

Thank you for your commitment, your voice and your vision.