Good day, Madam/Mr. Chair, Member States, and the ESCAP Secretariat. The Philippines wishes to convey our progress in the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

The Philippines is one of the first five countries that have acceded to the Framework Agreement. With its exclusive focus on paperless trade, it supports the Philippines’ initiatives in modernizing, standardizing, and harmonizing trade-related operations. We also recognize this treaty as a platform for accelerating digital connectivity by exchanging trade-related information not only in ASEAN but in other regions.

Following our Accession in 2019, the Philippines was chosen as one of the beneficiary countries of the trade component of the project "Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics". In December 2020, the ESCAP experts presented the project proposal to the Bureau of Customs, as Chairman of the National Single Window Technical Working Group (NSW-TWG), for the conduct of a technical and legal readiness assessment. The NSW-TWG agreed to implement the legal and technical readiness assessment for the Philippine Trade Regulatory Government Agencies (TRGAs) and private sector stakeholders involved in trade facilitation and cross-border trade.

To finalize the Philippines’ CBPT Report, and to validate the responses from participating government agencies from the NSW-TWG Members, including private stakeholders, the Philippines, in partnership with ESCAP, initiated two (2) national consultations through a virtual conference.

On March 01, 2022, the Philippines officially submitted the report on the Readiness Assessment for Cross-Border Paperless Trade to fulfill our obligation as a member party to the Framework Agreement. We acknowledge the results of the initial action plan which were formulated based on the UN ESCAP experts’ recommendations and inputs gathered during validation and the national consultations.

The conduct of the readiness assessment, in partnership with the experts from UN ESCAP, allowed the Philippines to include all forms of collaborations with participants from relevant government agencies and private sector stakeholders during the development of a National Action Plan. The checklists were prepared in general terms to reach a broad audience.
While it serves as a foundation for elaborating more detailed activities at the national and agency levels in the electronic exchange of documents, with identifiable timelines and potential key agencies, the Philippines applauds the initiatives of ESCAP in ensuring the flexibility of the legal framework, action plan and capacity-building programs depending on the various levels of awareness and preparedness at the national level. Having the readiness assessment provides a valuable basis for the continuous development and enhancement of trade-related electronic systems and other trade IT projects in the Philippines. More importantly, the Philippines sees that the readiness assessment will open opportunities for the electronic exchange of cross-border documents with members countries that have either acceded to or ratified the Framework Agreement.

Several challenges in implementing the cross-border paperless trade were carried out by the readiness assessment. Pressing issues remain which include the technical challenges and issues on data harmonization encountered by the PH government in realizing the goal of the single window; lack of in-depth understanding of the single window and business process analysis concepts among government agencies; and the lack of regional agreement/legal basis for the exchange of electronic documents.

To move forward on a cross-border paperless exchange, the ESCAP study and the Framework Agreement implementation could support overcoming these challenges by assisting the Philippines in (i) harmonizing technical and legal standards that apply to electronic trade data and documents; (ii) developing technical solutions for trade digitalization such as master data, and routing platforms; (iii) reducing capacity gaps among government agencies by providing inclusive access to knowledge and capacity building opportunities in a single window and other areas for paperless trade; and lastly, (iv) assisting the development of bilateral or multilateral agreements that would allow the exchange of electronic documents among countries in the region.

As a way forward, the Philippines intends to refer to the recommendations readiness assessment study in accelerating trade digitalization. We will also support increasing awareness at the national level of the framework agreement, and conduct similar stakeholder engagements in partnership with ESCAP. We are also pleased to share that the Philippines is scheduled to conduct the ceremonial launching of the Readiness Assessment for Cross-Border Paperless Trade: The Philippines in May this year.

We wish to encourage other member states to accede and support the implementation of the Framework Agreement. We also look forward to the first electronic document that our countries will exchange through this initiative. Thank you very much!