I am honored and privileged to be taking part in SDG Forum for North and Central Asia. I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, and to the Head of ESCAP’s Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, Nikolay Pomoshchchnikov, for giving me this opportunity, as this is such an important occasion for those of us working together in the UN Resident Coordinator system to engage with you all. The Resident Coordinators are critical interlocutors in the countries where they serve. They help leverage the collective strengths of the UN system, ensuring that we become greater than the sum of our individual parts. And this collaborative and coordinated way of working enables us to be better in delivering the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – not least in this challenging era.

Regional meetings such as this have global relevance. Not least because the theme matches that of the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: “Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda”. The HLPF will address SDG 4, on quality education; 5, on gender equality; 14, on life below water); 15, on life on land; and 17, on partnerships for the Goals. What you discuss here, and the actions that you set out, will therefore feed into global processes. At the same time, this event is vital to strengthening subregional coordination and collaboration. Such collaboration is the key to delivering on the ambition set by the international community in 2015 when it adopted the 2030 Agenda – even more because of the nature of the challenges that need to be overcome. They are complex, and do not respect borders. Collaboration is also about breaking silos. Action-oriented multistakeholder discussions like North and Central Asia SDG Forum are an important way to ensure the success of the SDGs, with added impetus in this Decade of Action.

The COVID crisis is the epitome of a complex, cross-border challenge – one where collaboration has made all the difference. There is no doubt that the costs of the COVID crisis have been high; Global GDP decreased by an estimated 3.5 per cent in 2020 and the pandemic has pushed a further 124 million people into extreme poverty. And, with less than a decade to go until 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals have been thrown even further off track. The response to COVID has served as a “stress-test” for the UN development system and its reform. It has revealed our shared vulnerability and interconnectedness, but also what we can achieve by working together. There are numerous occasions where the UN has seized this opportunity to build back better.

I am speaking to you today from Kazakhstan. Here, to meet the challenges posed by COVID, the UN Country Team conducted a number of rapid assessments, including a
gender assessment of the impact of the crisis, identified immediate challenges, and adjusted our programmatic and non-programmatic portfolios. As a result, the UN was able to repurpose and mobilize nearly $16 million in 2020 for COVID-19 response -- one quarter of which went to procuring medical supplies and training health care workers in infection prevention and control, case management and testing laboratories. The collective COVID response will need to continue beyond 2021, as populations and economies recover, in order to get SDG implementation back on track. Furthermore, COVID has not been halted by national borders. Cross-border responses to the pandemic have been essential to fighting it and will remain so. Working together is equally crucial to achieving the SDGs, and with the UN reform, 85% of Governments recognize that RCs have helped leverage partnerships for national SDG achievement. We all need to scale up our work on climate, humanitarian-development-peace collaboration and SDG Financing, including Integrated National Financing Frameworks.

You are well aware of the recent the release of the SG’s landmark report on the Common Agenda. Just like the COVID response, it hinges on working together. The Common Agenda, which is a core priority for the UN system, was developed in the wake of the pledge by Member States at UN75 to strengthen global governance for the sake of present and future generations. It stems from a recognition that we are at an inflection point in history. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a wake-up call and, in the face of the worsening climate crisis, the world is experiencing its biggest shared test since the Second World War. Humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: breakdown or breakthrough. The choices we make today — or fail to make — could result in further breakdown and a future of perpetual crises, or a breakthrough to a better, more sustainable, peaceful future for our people and planet. The Common Agenda is designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral agreements – particularly the 2030 Agenda – and make a tangible difference to people’s lives and build on recommendation across four broad areas.

**First**, it aims to deliver a renewal of the social contract, anchored in human rights, to rebuild trust and social cohesion. Much of our global unease is rooted in persistent poverty, hunger, lack of access to health care, education and income security, growing inequalities and injustices as well as misinformation and lack of confidence in institutions. **Second**, it puts the focus on the future, through a deepening of solidarity with the world’s young people and future generations. Those that inherit the consequences of the decisions we take today are barely represented in decision-making which is heavily weighted towards the short term. **Third**, it calls for urgent action to protect and deliver global commons – in the high seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica and outer space - and global public goods – such as peace, economic security, and global health. To achieve this, we need a multilateralism that is more networked, inclusive and effective. And **fourth**, it paves the way for an upgraded UN that is fit for a new era – one that can offer more relevant, system-wide, multilateral and multi-stakeholder solutions to the challenges of the 21st century. The transformation will be driven by data; digital innovation; strategic foresight; behavioral science; and a focus on performance and results.
The UN development system in Central Asia is committed to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals, through the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator System, and on the promise of the Common Agenda. In closing, I again want to thank the ESCAP and Nikolay Pomoshchhnikov, for the opportunity to participate in this important event, and emphasis that DCO and the Resident Coordinator System stand ready to support you all in our collective endeavors.