Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Distinguished Participants,

I am pleased to address you today on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and our 53 member societies in Asia Pacific. As we deliberate on the progress towards the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, we must do more to focus on those most vulnerable people that are still being left behind.

We have all just lived through the hottest year on record and we are facing multifaceted crises, including demographic shifts, conflict, the impacts of climate change and gaps in access to health services; more people are displaced now than ever before. In 2022 alone, 64 million people in Asia Pacific were impacted by disasters, most of whom are women. Our IFRC network has seen an unprecedented increase in humanitarian needs and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are needed now as much as ever, using their unique auxiliary role in humanitarian services to support authorities to reach vulnerable people. Our 20 million volunteers, including youth, who are living within and part of their communities, are active in promoting inclusion, providing outreach to improve access to health services and preparing people to be more resilient in the face of greater crises.

We are also seeing complex and protracted crises in the Region, millions of people displaced. Social inclusion, particularly for migrants and those displaced due to conflict, climate, and crisis, is more crucial than ever. During the humanitarian crisis caused by COVID-19 we saw profound and persistent inequities. Migrants, persons with disabilities,
older persons, women, and children living in fragile settings or in countries with under-resourced health systems were disproportionally affected. Our IFRC World Disasters Report, highlighted that the world wasn’t well prepared for the COVID19 pandemic and the importance of being ready and more prepared for future pandemics and public health emergencies. We urge governments to use the opportunity now to update and improve legal preparedness for Public Health Emergencies.

Finally, we can achieve the goals of the Ministerial Declaration and the Programme of Action, making our vision of a healthier, more equitable Asia and the Pacific a reality, but only if we focus on the community level and supporting the most vulnerable people to adapt and be resilient to crises.

Thank you.