Madam / Mr. Chair,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

At the outset, I convey my appreciation to the UNESCAP and UNFPA for organizing the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference and their sustained efforts on fostering the discourse on population and development in Asia and the Pacific. India believes that, for a diverse region like Asia-Pacific, that houses 60 percent of the world’s population, it is critical to synergise efforts for inclusive development that particularly takes care of poor and disadvantaged sections of our population.

Being home to diverse geographies and cultures, India is seized of the fact that bodily autonomy, rights-based sexual and reproductive health, and family planning play a critical role in driving inclusive growth and development. India has adopted a multi-pronged approach to address the issues that hinder inclusive growth and development, which have yielded positive results in the past few years.

The Government of India recognizes the pivotal role of women in nation building and encourages women to participate in all spheres and issues. Women are equal partners and key actors for strong, sustainable, balanced, and inclusive growth of the nation. They are central to achieving success vis-à-vis the three inter-connected pillars of People, Planet and Prosperity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals, particularly SDG-5 on achieving Gender Equality.

India has been one of the foremost countries in the world with a planned approach to population and development through sustained family planning initiatives. This is evidenced in the steadily declining fertility rate in India in the past two decades, from 2.5 in 2001 to 2.2 in 2011 and to 2.0 now, reducing further to 1.6 in urban areas.

Maternal health remains one of the key priorities of the Government of India. We have consistently worked towards the elimination of Maternal Mortality and Infant Mortality. In the past decade, there has been a significant decline in the Maternal
Mortality Ratio in India. India is on its way to achieve the target 3.1 of SDG 3 focused on reducing the maternal mortality ratio.

To foster maternal health, the Government of India has put up a robust frontline healthcare infrastructure in place, instituted through the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) programme, that has enabled sustained support for expectant mothers and the institutionalisation of healthcare services resulting in better health outcomes and increase in institutional births. Financial support has also been provided to more than 31 million expectant mothers, with a total disbursement of more than USD 1.6 billion.

I am happy to share that India has a landmark achievement in reduction of the child mortality rates, wherein neonatal mortality has reduced to 24.9 per 1000 live births. India has also made progress in reducing infant mortality that has significantly declined to 28 in 2020 from 44 in 2011.

Closely linked to infant mortality are forms of gender-based violence that manifest against the girl child, before and at birth. Under the umbrella of the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Programme (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child), the Government of India has targeted the root of this issue to prevent and eliminate female foeticide through a multipronged approach of stringent implementation of legal frameworks, behavioural change in the society towards the girl child, and financial support and incentives for the girl child. The concerted efforts of the Government of India have resulted in improvement of Sex Ratio at Birth from 918 to 933 females per 1000 males.

I would like to share that the recently adopted New Delhi Leader’s Declaration, under India’s G-20 presidency also emphasizes on the need for a transition from “women development” to “women-led development” and reaffirms its commitment to accelerate progress on the SDGs and gender-inclusive climate action.

Madam/ Mr. Chair,

To facilitate the ease of living and climate resilience action for all sections of the population, and especially noting the differential experiences faced by rural, remote populations in challenging topographies such as hilly and coastal areas, forests and
deserts, the Government of India has implemented several programmes to provide access to clean cooking fuel to 9.6 million households, safe and potable tap water connection for 13 million households, and access to safe sanitation through the construction of 112 million household toilets, and over 640,000 community toilets across the nation. This has also reduced time poverty and care burden on women, and eliminated potential threats to their health and safety. Women-led SHG groups have taken on the responsibility of running and operation & maintenance of infrastructure at community level, making these projects sustainable.

Finally, driving the discussion on gender-responsive climate action, the Government of India has set an ambitious target for achieving net zero by 2070, at COP26 in 2021. To this end, the Government is investing in and foregrounding women in innovation for a just transition to a carbon neutral economy.

To conclude, I reiterate the commitment of Government of India towards a rights-based, inclusive, innovative and sustainable approach to population and development, and vitality of the platform provided through the Asian and Pacific Population Conference in collectively driving solutions for the people and the planet that leave no one behind in the path to sustainable development. I firmly believe that deliberations held during this conference, will definitely lead to gender-responsive, climate smart outcomes for all sections of the society.

Thank you, Chair.

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