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Keynote Remarks  
Fifth North and Central Asian Multi-Stakeholder Forum  
on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals  

Tuesday, 5 October 2021  
13:00-14:00 (Bangkok time) Platform: ZOOM

Excellency Mr. Muhammetgeldi Serdarov, Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan,  
Excellencies, distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

A warm welcome to the 5th North and Central Asian Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the Government of Turkmenistan for co-hosting this Subregional SDG Forum for North and Central Asia.

COVID-19 pandemic has been impacting severely socio-economic development for everyone across nine member States in North and Central Asia over the past 1.5 years.

The increased intensities and frequencies of natural disasters, as highlighted in the latest IPCC report, exacerbated this hardship further.

Across North and Central Asia, these growing vulnerabilities are reversing the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals, creating irreparable damages in our economies and societies.

Our SDGs analysis illustrates the following:

- most progress can be seen in Goals related to reduced inequalities (Goal 10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16),
- while some progress has been made in quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), but
- Goals regressed in sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13) and life below water (Goal 14).
**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I would like to reiterate five strategic policy areas and related regional cooperation frameworks as highlighted in the 2020 Forum: social protection system, resilient supply chains for sustainable trade and investment, sustainable transport connectivity, financing for development, and climate change.

To recover better, stronger and smarter, these policy choices are in line with the principles of inclusion, resilience and sustainability for the post-pandemic recovery in North and Central Asia.

First, we need to put the social protection system at the centre of this recovery.

Through the provisioning of universal access to vaccination and strengthening healthcare systems, governments can restart their economies.

We need to build the resilience of education systems by incorporating digitalization while improving equity and inclusion in the delivery of public services for over 238 million people in North and Central Asia.

Time is now to explicitly mainstream gender-responsive policies and women empowerment in national development strategies.

Second, let us continue to develop resilient supply chains, sustainable trade and investment, and trade digitization in the region.

Trade facilitation initiatives could anchor around the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

I am pleased to underscore that ESCAP is scaling up work to prepare the readiness assessments for Cross-Border Paperless Trade and development.

Our work focuses equally on improving Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisor to support LLDCs in negotiating trade agreements for regional cooperation and integration.

The active participation of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are noteworthy.

Third, we must redouble our efforts to build sustainable transport, energy and ICT connectivity
I recognise several important initiatives in advancing subregional connectivity, along with the focus on integrated, sustainable, climate and disaster-resilient infrastructure development.

During the pandemic, the facilitation and efficient functioning of cross-border logistics and transit transport systems have been our key focus.

We are working to strengthen coordination for transboundary energy infrastructure and networks while implementing clean energy solutions.

Since our Forum in 2020, we have been working with Governments to harness e-resilience readiness of digital networks and ensure ICT infrastructure co-deployment, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Fourth, we need to create enabling environments for financing sustainable development.

Investing in a sustained and inclusive socio-economic recovery will require additional financial resources.

We are working with member States on enhanced Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF), financial inclusion and innovative financing tools such as thematic bonds to address post-COVID-19 financing needs.

Fifth, let us act now in safeguarding environmental health and raising climate ambition.

We need to embed long-term sustainability in COVID-19 policy response and incorporate environmental sustainability into business investment and national planning processes.

Government of Kyrgyzstan’s tabling of the resolution A/75/271 entitled “Nature knows no borders: transboundary cooperation – a key factor for biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use” at the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly would help achieve co-benefits for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

I also welcome initiatives of Turkmenistan to have a Special UN Programme for the Aral Sea basin.

Likewise, Uzbekistan has also announced a number of proposals to advance green growth and climate change.
Ladies and gentlemen,

ESCAP, in close coordination and collaboration with the UN family, stands ready to continue and deepen strategic partnerships with regional and subregional organisations and frameworks such as the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

I look forward to listening to your recommendations and guidance on the subregional priorities in North and Central Asia, which will further be discussed and shared at the 9th Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) on 28-31 March 2022.

I count on your continued commitment and leadership.

I wish everyone a successful Forum.

Thank you very much.