Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. First of all, on behalf of the Government of Nepal and my own, I would like to congratulate the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP and her team for convening the 77th Session of the UNESCAP despite restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The Pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges. It has changed not only our lifestyle but also our thought process. The life of every single human being has been impacted by the disruptions of the public health, education, and social security systems globally. Consequently, it has further exacerbated the vulnerabilities of the poor and marginalized societies. The global economy is also unprecedentedly at the lowest ebb.

Madam Chair

3. Each sector of the economy is hit hard due to the multidimensional impacts of the pandemic. Trade, tourism, and transport are the hardest hit sectors. Further, education, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, supply chain and service delivery have also been severely disrupted.

4. Nepal's economic growth had shrunken by around two percent points negative due to the pandemic. The revenue growth rate and capital expenditure had also reduced significantly. Likewise, the poverty, inequality and unemployment rates have reversed
the gains made in social development sectors in the recent past, including the SDGs. The pandemic pose challenges to achieve the goal of ‘Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali’ and it may hinder the aspiration of graduating from Least Developed country.

5. Beginning from March 2020, the Government of Nepal took various measures, including a nationwide lockdown, a ban on domestic and international flights, and a closure of land border crossings to contain the spread of COVID-19. The government has continued its focus on protecting people’s lives, strengthening the health care system, and building a sustainable and resilient recovery of the economy.

6. The Government has joined hands with social organizations and social media to increase public awareness on health protocols, safety, and sanitization. Several COVID-19 related Protocols and Guidelines have been developed. Testing and treatment services are provided free of cost to needy people. Similarly, necessary infrastructures, human and financial resources including medical equipment are ensured to strengthen the health systems at all levels. Moreover, PCR testing facilities are extended across the country and many hospitals have been designated as COVID-19 hospitals.

7. The government is moving ahead with the target of building hospitals with basic health care facilities at all Local Levels. It has increased health spending by providing additional insurance coverage to all frontline workers, importing additional medical supplies, and setting up quarantine centers and temporary hospitals.

8. To address the pandemic-induced unemployment, the government has focused on creating more employment opportunities within the country, particularly in the agriculture sector. The informal sector workers who lost their jobs due to the crisis were provided with the opportunity to work in public projects. The government also provided necessary funds for the repatriation of Nepali migrant workers abroad facing serious health risks, job loss and other legal complications.
9. To revive the industrial and commercial sectors, the Government has provided economic relief packages which include soft loans, tax concessions, fee waivers, and discounts on electricity and other services.

10. The Government has also widened the scope of social security. Social assistance was strengthened by providing the vulnerable ones with daily food rations, subsidized utility bills, extended tax-filing deadlines, and partial compensation to those in the formal sector who lost wages.

11. The government of Nepal has also launched the vaccination campaign from late January this year to limit the spread of covid-19 pandemic.

12. While we are focusing on limiting the spread of virus and the recovery of the strained economy, the second wave of the pandemic has now hit the country. The number of infections continues to rise and restrictions on movement have been imposed by the local administrations as the need may be.

13. At the regional platforms, Nepal is engaged with other countries in sharing knowledge, experience, technology, and best practices that could help develop resilience and to fight the pandemic collectively. It upholds that the regional partners should promote expanding connectivity and a smooth supply of essential medicines and medical equipment to contain the spread of the virus.

**Madam Chair**

14. At present, the entire humanity is in crisis. Therefore, we need collaborative action as one world. For this, we must avert vaccine nationalism and make vaccines a truly global public good that is affordable and accessible to all. In this context, Nepal commends the initiative of the UN Secretary-General for convening the 31st Special Session of the General Assembly in Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic, held in December last year.

15. We welcome the global initiatives and measures that are taken in response to COVID-19 as well as for considering the least developed countries like Nepal with
priority. However, there is a need for an enhanced cooperation mechanism particularly amid the surging second wave of the mutant trait of the virus.

16. In the end, I would like to conclude by appreciating the support received from the development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, in tackling the current crisis and look forward to receiving enhanced support in building back a better and resilient economy.

Thank you.