Statement delivered by Hon. Prof. Dr. Puspa Raj Kadel, Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission and the leader of Nepali delegation to the 77th Session of the UNESCAP at the Special Body on Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Pacific Island Developing States through online platform on 28 April 2021

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP,

Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for OHRLLS,

Chair of the Committee on Development Policy,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

1. Let me begin by thanking the UNESCAP for convening this very important meeting of the Special Body of LDCs, LLDCs, and PIDS.

2. We are holding this meeting at the crucial time when the world is struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the adverse effects of the pandemic, many LDCs including Nepal are facing new challenges posed by the virus.

3. We know that before COVID-19 pandemic, the LDCs of the Asia Pacific had made significant progress in implementing the
IPoA. A steady economic growth helped them to meet internationally agreed development goals, including the SDGs. Three Asia-Pacific countries, namely, the Maldives, Samoa, and Vanuatu, graduated from the LDC status before 2020, with many others becoming eligible for graduation.

4. Nepal had been a member of the LDC since the introduction of this category in 1971. It has thrice fulfilled two of the three graduation criteria viz. Human Assets Index and Economic Vulnerability Index in 2015, 2018, and 2021. This year, Nepal is recommended for graduation with a preparatory period of five years.

5. Nepal has now started preparing a strategy for a smooth, irreversible, and sustainable graduation with diversified options for financing as well as utilizing trade measures to bolster the readiness of the business sector for competitive trade.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic has affect all sectors including health, trade, tourism, transport, education, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors, among others. The economic growth has shrunken, and revenue growth rate and capital expenditure
have also reduced significantly in addition to other far-reaching adverse impacts.

7. The Government has concentrated its efforts towards controlling and mitigating the pandemic through appropriate policy measures and program interventions. The ongoing budget has given high priority to save people’s lives with a robust focus on reviving the resilient economy and enhancing social welfare programmes.

8. The Government also introduced relief packages including social protection measures targeting daily wage earners, the poor, and other vulnerable people. Likewise, the Government also provided concessional loans, tax rebates and delayed payments of taxes to the business and industrial community.

**Excellencies,**

9. At this critical juncture of time, the integrated approach of LDCs, LLDCs, and PIDS can play a pivotal role in promoting economic growth, diversifying trade as well as transforming structural barriers and addressing multidimensional poverty. Most of the LDCs are suffer from lack of competitiveness which limits the capacity of wealth accumulation, investment
and productivity driven growth. Therefore, a strategy for increasing the competitiveness and economic diversification along with capital investment and promotion of advanced technology is crucial in enhancing their capacities.

10. The Government of Nepal has focused on improving quality healthcare services, protecting the lives of the people, and reviving the economy, including the education sector to reduce the adverse effect of the pandemic.

11. Other areas including agriculture, trade, science and technology, private sector development, human and social development are also vital. Similarly, mobilizing financial resources for development and capacity building is extremely important.

12. At a time of crisis like this, the role of development partners has become more critical. International cooperation including availability and accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines, financial support, as well as debt relief measures are crucial for LDCs, LLDCs, and PIDS. The support measures should focus on increasing the social and economic resilience of the vulnerable economies.

Excellencies,
Before concluding, I wish to stress that this is a time of great challenges and opportunities. I urge all countries in this region to join hands together to save the lives of our people, planet, and the future of humanity.

I thank you all.