His Excellency, ____________ Permanent Representative of the ____________ to the United Nations and Chair of the 7th Asian and Pacific Conference, Distinguished Heads of State and Government; Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour and privilege to join and address this august Hall. On behalf of our Prime Minister and our people’s behalf, I congratulate you, Mr Chair, and the Government and people of ________, on your election to preside over the 7th Asian and Population Conference.

Or (So as not to wait for the results of the election of the Chair of the Conference).

Distinguished Heads of State and Government; Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour and privilege to join and address this august Hall.

Mr. Chair.

The focus of this conference on intersecting population and development considerations as they relate to sustainable development, both now and in the future is relevant in this continuing climate of rising turbulence, uncertainty, pain and suffering, from multiple crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the worsening climate crisis, escalating socio-economic challenges, and conflicts and violence tearing us apart.

The special focus of this conference on placing people at the center of development is commendable as indeed our most important resource is our human capital. In Papua New Guinea, the quality of human capital is a key ingredient to the success of our key policies and legislative measures, including reforms in important sectors and development priorities tied to our budget cycle under our Medium-Term Development Plan IV. This is consistent with our aspiration for Papua New Guinea to be a middle-income earning nation by 2050 as envisioned by our nation’s Vision 2050.

Mr. Chair.

Papua New Guinea has a very young population where half of the population is aged below 21 years. PNG’s population is foreseen to remain young until the next two to three decades as reflected in the population projections for the country launched a month ago. Through investments in the quality of our human capital, especially our young girls and boys, we will not only accelerate the achievement of our development aspirations soonest but also improve the future of our succeeding generations in Papua New Guinea. This is why investments in our youth, specifically on their health, education, employment and empowerment, will enable PNG to reap the demographic dividend, which is an overarching framework of our Medium Term Development Plan IV.
The population projections for PNG also estimated that the population of PNG in 2050 will reach 21.7 million, from 12.9 million in the current year (2023), and looking back at the population slightly above four decades ago (in 1980) - it was only 3 million. With this expected trend of population growth in PNG, indeed there is a need for well-planned and well-implemented population policies. In PNG, the main driver of population growth is the still high fertility rate or the average number of children that are born to a woman over her lifetime. In 2016–2018, the fertility rate was 4.2 children per woman, and in 2022, it was reduced to 3.7 children per woman though still high. Hence, it is important that a sound population policy is in place in the country.

I am pleased to share Mr. Chair that PNG is now reviewing its National Population Policy which is anchored on the International Conference on Population Development or ICPD in 1994, where PNG was among the 179 countries that ratified the ICPD Plan of Action. The good news is that PNG now has the population data for critical planning. This was not the case in the development of previous national population policies which only had the population census, demographic and health survey (DHS) and household income and expenditure survey (HIES) data that could be relied upon.

These includes the latest 2022 Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey where national data gathered from a total of around 5,000 sample households in PNG’s 22 provinces on key variables such as fertility, mortality, labour, education, disability, migration, youth, and gender were made available. In addition, PNG has the 2021 Population Modeled Estimates (PMES) derived from a combination of satellite images and household surveys. The PMES has disaggregated data at the local government level by age and sex. Finally, we have the 2030 to 2050 population projections for the country and we expect that the National Transfer Accounts estimates for PNG that measure how people at each age produce, consume and share resources and save for the future will be available before the end of this year. PNG expects data from the population census, DHS and HIES surveys within the next two to three years.

Mr. Chair.

On the issue of gender, gender equality and respect for women are much ingrained in the PNG Constitution. We have established programmes for men and boys to return to PNG’s basic values and refrain from inflicting all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls. These include value-based conversations such as our Hausman and Hausmeri dialogues which instills in young men the value of respecting women and girls. Having three of every five women being a GBV survivor in our country is unacceptable. Gender-based violence remains a top priority for the Government of PNG. PNG has established a bipartisan permanent Parliamentary Committee to seriously address better protection of our women and girls and give them fair and just opportunities to reach their full potential. Legislation, policies and budgets have also been put in place to address concerns related to gender equality, empowerment and combat gender-based violence.

Additionally, we are pleased to have two new well qualified women parliamentarians join our 11th Parliament, an improvement from our last Parliament, where there were no women Parliamentarians. The Government recognizes women’s capabilities and professionalism. PNG will continue to work hard to have more women representatives in decision-making bodies, as equal development partners.
PNG also recognizes the need to reduce preventable maternal deaths in the country. PNG still has one of the highest preventable maternal mortality rates in the Pacific and in the world. Given that PNG believes that women should not die giving life, we support the provision of timely and quality emergency obstetric and newborn care, skilled attendance at birth, and planned families. Our decentralised health service delivery will need to provide access to timely and quality pre and post-natal care as well as address gaps in trained health service providers, including midwives, safe and clean delivery equipment, kits and medicines, timely transport to the health facilities, and counselling especially in the rural areas where 87 percent of our population reside during normal times and emergencies.

Finally, sustainable population and development are key element of our Medium-Term Development Plan IV. For the first time in our country, we have a separate chapter for Population, Youth and Women Empowerment. The Plan also supports the importance of having better quality, disaggregated and georeferenced data to inform effective policy making and decision-making. Our Government has set aside its own resources to embark on its National Census of Population next year. Our Census was deferred in 2020 due the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr Chair, we remain committed to engage in this CPD process, and in the fulfilment of the unfinished agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development because it provides an opportunity for us to also draw parallels with our national efforts to attain our National Vision 2050. We fully support the noble aspirations of accelerating the end of preventable maternal deaths, unmet need for family planning and gender-based violence and all forms of harmful practices before 2030.

Mr. Chair, we would like to reiterate the message that we delivered in the 2022 General Assembly. For the next five years, PNG will continue to build a resilient and diversified economy, invest in high quality economic and social infrastructure, ensure fair and equitable natural resources development, address business and investment confidences, strengthening the rule of law and domestic security, deliver quality education and health to all and strengthening the Institutions of State including governance. We will use modern clean green technology in our industrialization efforts so as not to compromise our country’s rich biodiversity and our pristine natural environment for PNG is documented to have about five to six percent of the world’s biodiversity and our huge tropical rainforest third behind Congo and the Amazon areas of our Earth.

Let me conclude by thanking you Mr Chair and this august body for this speaking opportunity in this 7th session of the Asian and Pacific Population Conference.