OPENING REMARKS

BY

H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

AT

DIALOGUE WITH SUBREGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

DURING THE 78TH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)

25 MAY 2022
10:00 – 12:00 HOURS

UN CONFERENCE CENTRE – ESCAP HALL
BANGKOK, THAILAND

Please check against delivery.
• Madam Executive Secretary;
• H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations;
• H.E. Mr. Ersala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation;
• H.E. Mr. Zhang Ming, Secretary-General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization;
• H.E. Mr. Mikhail Myasnikovich, Chairman, Eurasian Economic Commission;
• H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri, Secretary-General, Economic Cooperation Organization;
• Ms. OU Boqian, Secretary-General, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat;
• Dr. Filimon Manoni, Deputy Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat;
• Mr. Andrey Smorodin, Director, Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) Secretariat;
• Excellencies;
• Distinguished Participants;
• Ladies and Gentlemen;
1. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to this important in-person session on “Subregional Cooperation to Advance Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific,” at the 78th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

2. This session is both timely and pertinent, as it rightly recognizes the importance of partnerships within and across sub-regions for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. It also provides a unique opportunity for dialogue and coordination of efforts in implementing the global Agenda and facilitating the sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. More importantly, this session acknowledges that ESCAP and its Member States cannot advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific without meaningful engagement of sub-regional organizations.
5. Sub-regional organizations are critical partners in addressing global challenges such as climate change, inequalities, and the COVID-19 pandemic, amongst others.

6. As such, Asia-Pacific countries and their sub-regions have to align their development pathways to advance the common agenda to achieve inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

7. As President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), I am delighted to note that partnerships between the United Nations and sub-regional organizations have grown substantially over the past decades.

8. In this respect, I am highly encouraged by the strong participation of sub-regional organisations at this Commission's session. It is only through strong partnerships and collaborations that we can
successfully confront current and future global challenges.

9. I am gratified that ESCAP has placed partnerships at the core of its work. I am equally pleased with the work of the formal and informal partnerships that have been forged to advance sustainable development in Asia-Pacific region.

10. The established cooperation frameworks have enabled the Asia-Pacific region to identify shared priorities and interests and matching those with different sub-regional needs.

11. Through these engagements, Asia-Pacific countries have created synergies and leveraged on their comparative advantages to deliver impactful regional and national projects.

**Distinguished Participants,**

12. The COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented socio-economic impacts as well as current global developments and the effects of climate change are
impending the trajectory towards sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.

13. These daunting challenges call for ambitious actions to change course, and accelerate progress across a range of development challenges.

14. This session offers you a perfect opportunity to identify areas that you need to accelerate progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the region, while also paying close attention to areas that you are experiencing stagnation and regression in each of the five sub-regions of ESCAP.

15. Having done that, it will also be of paramount importance to identify sub-regional priority areas for action.

16. To contribute to this exercise, I would like to make the following recommendations for your consideration.

17. In the Pacific sub-region -- which is home to many Small Island Developing States -- I recommend that
building climate resilience and sustainable connectivity should be at the forefront of national priorities.

18. In East and North-East Asia, carbon neutrality should be viewed as key to environmental sustainability and countries in this sub-region should strive towards net-zero emissions.

19. In South-East Asia, countries should intensify their inclusivity efforts guided by the principles to “Leave No One Behind” and “Reaching the Furthest Behind First.”

20. For South and South-West Asia, cross-border connectivity, regional integration, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable graduation for Least Developed Countries are of critical significance.

21. For the North and Central Asia sub-region -- which consists mainly of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) -- I recommend the prioritization of digitalization, structural economic transformation and
cross-border transport and trade for a green and inclusive development.

22. As current Chair of LLDCs for the period 2022 – 2023, I am also leading Botswana’s efforts at the United Nations in New York to contribute in addressing the challenges faced by the LLDCs Group.

23. I urge all the five sub-regions of ESCAP to heed the clarion call made in the 2022 Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report that every Asia-Pacific sub-region has regressed on climate action -- making it an urgent and common priority area, including those related to climate-disaster risk reduction as well as social resilience.

24. I am glad that many of the sub-regional organizations present here today have undertaken initiatives that are aligned with the priority areas that I have just outlined.

25. I am therefore eager to listen to your presentations to get first-hand information on the achievements,
opportunities, and challenges encountered in implementing these priority areas.

26. To this end, I wish to underline the Secretary-General’s call for enhanced institutional cooperation between the United Nations and sub-regional organizations.

27. In this regard, we should use regional cooperation to advance the recommendations made by the UN Secretary-General in his report on *Our Common Agenda*, and to address current and future challenges confronting humanity.

28. We still have to do more to strengthen regional cooperation, not only with the sub-regional organizations but also amongst them, as countries share transboundary and cross-border issues that require support, representation, and collaboration at the sub-regional, regional and global levels.

29. The critical role of sub-regional organizations in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development is not in doubt. This session goes a long way in promoting continuous dialogue with subregional organizations, which is one of the key proposals of *Our Common Agenda*.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Participants,**

30. As I conclude my remarks, I wish to join the UN Secretary-General to emphasize the critical importance of a stronger, more networked, and inclusive multilateral system in addressing global challenges and advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

31. The COVID-19 pandemic has also unleashed new opportunities and challenged Governments, young people, civil society, development partners and international organizations to find creative and innovative initiatives.

32. But for us to make a transformative impact in the face of a devastating pandemic and other challenges, we must abandon the business-as-usual approaches.
33. I am pleased to have participated in this session, which is reinforcing the commitment of Asia-Pacific States to advancing sustainable development and promoting dialogue with sub-regional organizations.

34. The session contributes in no small measure to strengthening multilateralism, and highlighting the Asia-Pacific priorities to the international community.

35. As President of ECOSOC, I wish to assure you that the Council will continue to support the work of ESCAP and its sub-regional organizations.

36. **I look forward to listening to the sub-regional perspectives, and I thank you for your kind attention.**