Thank you Chair, your excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

Let me begin by thanking UN ESCAP and UNFPA for their work in organising this Commission and for all the extensive preparatory work in compiling the evidence-based reports and convening stakeholder consultations in advance.

Asia and the Pacific is home to 60 per cent of the world’s population. The region is particularly susceptible to climate change. The challenges we face know no boundaries. What happens here matters globally.

The 30th Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development is an opportunity for us all to come together to reflect on, and celebrate the global progress made on quality education, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, universal health coverage, sustainable development and human rights.

Sustainable and equitable development can only be realised when all women, adolescents and girls have their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled, when no women or girl is truly left behind. This includes targeting rural communities, persons with disabilities, LGBT+ people and those facing multiple layers of discrimination. The UK is proud to support comprehensive Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) for women, adolescents, and girls. This year alone the UK provided the UNFPA Supplies Partnership with nearly $5m to Asian and Pacific Island Countries as part of our annual $74m contribution to finance contraceptives and provide technical assistance to strengthen health systems in this region.

The UK stands behind the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development in protecting the fundamental freedoms for all and addressing the root causes of poverty. We stand boldly beside others in Asia Pacific, who are striving to ensure that by 2030 all women and adolescents have agency over their own lives and futures and control over their own bodies are able to make fully informed choices on having children and are able to give birth safely, free from coercion and violence.

Chairs, excellencies, the global context we find ourselves in compared to 30 years ago is fundamentally different. As we have heard today, whilst the general global trend has been positive, we have to address head on the challenges that we are experiencing.

We face an emboldened, global anti-rights movement, putting at risk women and girls’ lifesaving access to comprehensive SRHR including quality contraception, education and lifesaving maternal health services.

This is further compounded by the devastating legacy of the pandemic compounded by other legal and socio-economic barriers that women, adolescents, and girls are facing. The pandemic brought to light the increased burden of unpaid care and underscored the urgent need to focus more on equality. Conflict, crises and climate change are among those universal challenges where women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted.

We have a duty to collectively stand up to these universal challenges and ensure that women and girls around the world can enjoy their human rights and have agency over their own body.

Whilst we have not achieved the full ambitions agreed in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development – there is much to celebrate.
There has been a decline in child marriage in most geographical subregions in Asia and the Pacific in the last decade. We have seen considerable progress in areas of family planning, and not just in middle-income countries.

We saw social protection measures implemented during the pandemic prove themselves valuable and demonstrate key lessons that the UK can learn from and we hope to hear more of in the coming days, such as good examples in the region of gender-responsive measures, for example in Thailand where informal workers were registered and recognised and in some countries, such as Cambodia, in responding to multiple/sequential crises thereby addressing people experiencing flooding and inflation.

Thank you to UNESCAP and UNFPA for maintaining and creating additional space for civil society and youth activists in advance of today. We will use our platforms to champion their needs, we will listen to the voices of young people and we will create space for their leadership. The achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of the demographic dividend relies on investing in young people and addressing their aspirations early on.

I am inspired by the progress and commitment from those in the room today. Together, we must maintain a strong focus on coordinated global action to support the most vulnerable. As we look forward to the Summit of the Future and ICPD + 30, I want to say to all women and girls, and those most marginalised around the world, that there is hope. The UK remains fully committed to listening to you, amplifying your voices and supporting you as decision-makers, as advocates, and as leaders of the future.

Thank you Chair, Excellencies for your time.