UNHCR Statement for the 11th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

“Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions in Asia and the Pacific”.

Madame/ Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, we welcome the renewed focus on accelerating the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia Pacific.

This meeting is convening at an important time. While positive steps have been taken to reduce poverty and to promote sustainable development in the region, present trends suggest that Asia-Pacific is set to achieve only one third of the necessary SDG progress by 2030.

Also, crucially, while the 2030 Agenda is universal, its implementation across different segments of the population is uneven, oftentimes putting refugees, asylum seekers and stateless populations at a particular disadvantage.

This can readily be observed across the five SDGs that are under review in this year’s Forum on Sustainable Development:

**SDG 1: No Poverty:** As displacements usually concur with an individual’s loss of job, livelihood, assets and land, displaced populations across Asia and the Pacific, as elsewhere in the world, are particularly at risk of living in poverty. Refugees and asylum seekers who settle in socio-economically depressed areas are especially affected, noting that as many refugees have specific vulnerabilities that distinguish them from other poor populations, further increasing their risk profiles.

**SDG 2: Zero Hunger:** Displaced populations who depend on humanitarian rations to meet their food needs are particularly at risk of food insecurity. As a consequence of underfunding of the humanitarian response, refugees in some countries across Asia-Pacific face food ration cuts, which can result in malnutrition, anemia and stunted child growth. Food insecurity also forces many refugees and forcibly displaced to undertake perilous journeys, including by sea.

**SDG 13: Climate Action:** Climate impacts are threatening the habitability of a set of diverse regions across Asia-Pacific, such as low-lying Bangladesh and the Mekong Delta as well as Afghanistan, often subject to a reoccurring cycle of floods and droughts. Most of the movements attributed to climate change have so far been over short distances, mainly within a country. IDMC data from the Global Report on Internal Displacement showed 22.6 million people had been displaced due to climate disasters in the region in 2022, which is easily the majority of the global total (32.6 million), noting here that many of those displacements have been short term for the time being.

**SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions:** There are presently 2.5 million stateless persons in the Asia-Pacific region. Stateless persons are often among the most marginalized and impoverished members of any society. The fact that a person is not recognized as a national is often the cause of exclusion from a wide range of rights that the international human rights regime considers in principle to be universal—ranging from freedom from arbitrary detention or the right to vote, to access to education and health care—as well as from the benefits of and opportunities to contribute to the social and economic development of the country where they live. The fulfilment of the right to a nationality for all is key to the fulfilment of development goals – including the eradication of poverty. Stateless people are among those most likely to be left behind in any development process. The
achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals therefore requires attention to the problem of statelessness.

**SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals:** Overall, there has been significant progress in recent years in strengthening partnerships and mobilizing resources to achieve SDG 17 in the Asia-Pacific region. This progress is a testament to the region’s commitment to sustainable development and the fostering of global partnerships. This momentum has been driven by both governmental and non-governmental actors, demonstrating the power of whole-of-society engagement, as exemplified by the recent Global Refugee Forum, where some 160 commitments were made towards meeting the mounting needs of – and very importantly - providing solutions for those forcibly displaced and stateless persons in our region, including the Afghan and Rohingya refugees. However, there is still more work to be done to overcome the challenges that remain, such as limited financial resources, weak capacity, poor coordination, and lack of mechanisms for measuring its impact. This also includes a concerted effort under the Leaving no one behind (LNOB) principle, to ensure that refugees, asylum seekers and stateless populations are not being left behind.

In closing, allow me to reiterate our call for increased international solidarity, including in the form of development aid, towards countries generously hosting those who have been forced to flee. UNHCR stands ready to continue supporting the collective efforts to realise the promise of the SDGs, to ensure refugees, internally displaced and stateless people are not left behind.

Thank you, Chair.