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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE FOR THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
SEVENTY-SEVENTH SESSION
New York, 26 April 2021**

My greetings to all those gathered for this seventy-seventh session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest test the world has faced in generations. Many people and communities are still suffering deeply, both from the disease and from its economic and social impact.

The roll-out of vaccines, including through the global vaccine equity mechanism, COVAX, is offering hope. Yet we still see uneven access to this global public good, around the world and within countries. Everyone, everywhere must have access to vaccines.

And social and economic support must be targeted at the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, who have been disproportionately affected.

Looking forward, recovery plans cannot be based on outdated, unsustainable economic models. Investments to rebuild the economy must be centred around inclusive, sustainable development that prioritizes people and planet.

Many ESCAP members are charting a course towards a strong recovery from the pandemic, by committing to net zero emissions and green growth. But across the Asia-Pacific region, millions of people remain highly vulnerable and at risk.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is our blueprint for a strong recovery that leaves no one behind.

That starts with universal health coverage and social protection, and decent work.

We must also strengthen trade and transport cooperation, and bridge the digital divide within and among countries. This will require the creation of fiscal space, including through debt relief and reforms to the debt architecture.

And we must make peace with nature and redouble our efforts to tackle the climate crisis – investing in renewable energy, sustainable food systems and nature-based solutions.

This is a pivotal year for people, economies, societies and our planet.

Together, let's build a strong recovery from the pandemic, relaunch the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, and create cleaner, greener, and more inclusive economies and societies that provide opportunities for all.

Thank you.