Honourable Chair,
Excellency, Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana,
Excellency, Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu,
Chair of the Committee on Development Policy, Mr. Jose Antonio Ocampo,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to share with you today, Vanuatu’s LDC graduation journey and a few key takeaways that we could reflect on as we work together to support the graduating and graduated Asia-Pacific LDCs in navigating preparations for graduation, smooth transition beyond graduation towards sustainable development in the midst of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We completed our Smooth Transition Strategy in December 2019 and endorsed by the Government in July 2020. Our development partners, particularly UNESCAP through its subregional office in Suva, UNDESA, UNCTAD, EU, the Government of Australia and New Zealand have been very supportive towards the development of our Smooth Transition Strategy and UNDESA and UNESCAP with its implementation, and for that we are forever grateful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Vanuatu has taken a bold step to graduate out of the LDC category on December 4, 2020, despite the category 5 TC Harold and in the midst of COVID-19.
Our Smooth Transition Strategy makes it very clear that the impact of losing International Support Measures will be minimal. However, we do know that the future ahead of us will remain challenging.

In such a unique situation where business as usual, cannot be the way forward, we lodged with the UN an LDC resolution seeking an extension of International support measures for an additional period of 5 years. The resolution has been adopted by the UN General Assembly and now we have a window of opportunity to explore new export markets. Accessing development finance will, however, remain an uphill battle.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For the graduating LDCs, it is important that preparation for a Smooth Transition Strategy is commenced earlier rather than later.

We need the international community to strengthen and expand the international support measures both for graduating and graduated countries. This is especially important given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to build resilience in these countries to prevent future shocks.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Reviving economic growth in the aftermath of the pandemic will be a significant challenge for the Asia-Pacific least developed countries. We need to build on valuable experiences of the Istanbul Program of Action and develop smart program of action for LDCs for the next decade.

I therefore support the policy priorities put forward by this Commission to support graduating and graduated LDCs for the next ten years.

I thank you!