Esteemed delegates, representatives and distinguished guests,

My name is Sangay Dechen Gyanzo, and I am a youth delegate from Bhutan. I represent CSOs and youth organizations from 25 countries that convened for a forum on 13-14 November.

The voices, ideas, and commitments I witnessed during the forum from fellow youth delegates and CSO representatives have been nothing short of remarkable. Our discussions and Call to Action underline the urgency of recognizing the pivotal role that young people and civil societies play in the development agenda. It highlights our unity in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and poverty eradication among many others.

Since the ICPD in 1994, the governments in the region have played the most crucial role in ensuring the realization of the SDG agenda. The government, development partners, CSOs, young people, and other stakeholders have been partners envisioning one common future: to progress leaving no one behind.

Speaking for myself, without the efforts of my government, my life could have taken a starkly different turn with my sexual and reproductive rights at risk, and the mere dreadful thought is unsettling. However, it’s important to acknowledge that the reality I hesitate to imagine is still a harsh truth for many in various parts of the Asia-pacific region.

Sexual and gender-based violence is still concerningly prevalent in the region, particularly among young people yet we see it often getting overlooked. Shockingly, 50% of youth aged 15-24 in the Pacific face physical and sexual intimate partner violence. South Asia has an alarming level of violent deaths among adolescent girls, almost twice the global rate. Adolescents, women, other marginalized groups continue to be targets of different forms of violence and harmful practices. The region witnesses the highest global rate of child marriage, affecting 45% of women aged 20-24.

Hence, we call for governments to prioritize people-centered laws and policies that empower young people and marginalized groups to make informed sexual and reproductive decisions throughout their lifespan.

We call for the governments to ensure that appropriate and quality health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, social and long-term care support is not only available, but also affordable and accessible to people, prioritizing marginalized groups, furthest behind.

Our Call to Action serves as a reminder that this conference is not just about numbers and statistics, but about people - individuals with dreams, aspirations, and the potential to drive positive change. Throughout the three days and all the years to follow, I hope you remember the voices of the 7th APPC, yours and mine, striving passionately to transform the lives of the present and future generations. And in places where these voices go unheard, I hope you will echo ours as you work towards creating a better world that really leaves no one behind.

Thank you.