Your excellences,
Dear delegates,

Let me on behalf of the Republic of Armenia welcome the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing + 25 Review and reassure Armenia’s strong commitment to enhance gender equality agenda both locally and globally acting as the co-chair of the Committee on Status of Women for 64th and 65th sessions, as well as newly elected member of UN Human Rights Council.

During the last years, promotion of gender equality and human rights of women in Armenia has witnessed both progress and challenges. In line with its international commitments, the country has made significant strides in adopting legislative and policy reforms path to foster gender equality and to combat violence against women.

The principle of equality between sexes is secured at the highest legislative level in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and is further reflected in the national legislation. The Government of Armenia has been taking certain steps to harmonize national policies with the gender equality principles, commitments undertaken by international instruments to which Armenia is a signatory, as well as with international requirements in the field. In particular, the following was considered:

- Respective recommendations were addressed to the Armenian counterparts by the two UN human rights monitoring bodies, CEDAW and CAT, in November, 2016;
- Respective recommendations of CPRD were given in March, 2017;
- Sustainable development goals were included into the "2030 Sustainable Development Agenda" of January 1, 2016;
- Agreements were signed between the Republic of Armenia and the European Union on the GSP+ Trading regime (2014), Support to Protection of Human Rights in Armenia (2015), and the EU budget support Program on Public Finance Policy Reform in Armenia. Armenian legislation does not contain any norm that restricts women’s rights. On the contrary, the latter grants privileges and guarantees for pregnant women and for mothers of children of various ages (1, 3, 8, etc.).

Now 25 years after Beijing we still need to push for more women participation in decision making process. While this is highly recognized around the countries the everyday practices still need improvement.

I would like to provide one recent example from Velvet Revolution happened in Armenia in spring, 2018. Women had a highly visible role in the peaceful protests with female activists seen on the barricades and setting up the roadblocks in demonstrations. This role was acknowledged regularly on the highest political level opening up new spaces for women and girls in the society to be more visible and also be empowered for further achievements.

The Electoral Code (May 25, 2016) sets gender-sensitive quotas (compared to the previous Code, the quotas have increased by 10%) aimed at increasing the women’s representation in the legislative power. The last election of the National Assembly took place on December 9, 2018. As a result, there are 132 elected parliament members, of which 32 or 24% are women. In comparison, during the previous elections of the National Assembly women parliamentarians constituted 18%.

In September 2019 the Government adopted a comprehensive Action Plan and Gender Strategy for coming five years through a participatory approach which among others sets quotas on country and local level to promote participation of women in decision making process at all levels.

Since 2018-2019 the Government has commenced a reinforcement of a series of effective mechanisms aimed at ensuring gender equality, such as re-establishment of the Council on Women Issues with the purpose of coordination of activities related to the issues of equality of women and men and the development of a national mechanism for equal rights and opportunities for women and men with enlarged participation of civil society, reestablishment of the Gender Thematic Group, development and enforcement of gender-sensitive budgeting tools and instruments. Armenia documented a slight progress in the Gender Gap Index, which is defined in four major areas: economy, politics, education and healthcare.
The role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, engagement in other humanitarian missions as well as rehabilitation activities in the post-conflict period was enhanced. Moreover, the National Action Plan was developed based on the UN SC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and further adopted by the Government in February 2019. The National Action Plan allows Armenia, referring to the provisions of the 1325 Resolution, to address a number of issues of special importance for the country. Those issues include: focusing on economic and social development of women residing in borderline communities; ensuring a special protection of displaced women and girls; promoting women’s engagement in peacekeeping missions; protecting women’s rights and increase their political participation, etc.

Excellences,

This conference is happening during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence around the world which is very symbolic. My country is among those that put continuous efforts to eliminate violence against women as a key priority. Since 2016 large scale awareness-raising has been undertaken within the framework of the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” campaign, which is held annually (November 25 to December 10).

In 2017 Armenia initiated a campaign aimed at the awareness-raising on domestic violence, the purpose of which was to inform the public about this issue as well as about the effective methods of fighting against it. As a result, the National Assembly on December 13, 2017 adopted the “Law on prevention of violence within the family, protection of victims of violence within the family and restoration of peace in the family,” which ensures preventive and protective mechanisms for the victims of domestic violence, as well as it guarantees the social assistance. On February 27, 2018 the Government adopted the Action Plan aimed at the effective enforcement of the Law, and on June 10 the Council on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Armenia was established. Currently the Government in partnership with the civil society is in the process of establishment of support centers in all regions of Armenia to provide support services for domestic violence victims. Moreover, the Government adopts the Regulation to provide financial assistance to the victims of domestic violence. As well state funding will be provided for two shelters.

Just recently, in October 2019, Government adopted the centralized registry for the domestic violence cases which will provide opportunities to have comprehensive and complete data on domestic violence cases around the country. We have signed the Istanbul Convention and are in the process of ratification. One thing I would like to stress here is the need for awareness raising among public to avoid manipulation and right wing populism which intensify the hate speech towards women human rights defenders around the world. This is one area of our joint effort to be put in.

Women’s professional engagement is one of the constituting features of the ICT sector in Armenia. According to the research and data collected by the Enterprise Incubator Foundation, in 2018-2019 the women and girl’s engagement in the ICT sector constitutes 37% in the Republic of Armenia. With this indicator Armenia ranked the 4th in the world. This indicator gradually increases due to the support of the different organizations in the sector and the conditions were created for an effective combination of career and family life, paid maternity leave, creation of mother and child care premises in the companies. In the ICT sector high professional qualifications and skills are the priority. The number of women and girls lecturing and studying in higher education institutions in the centers of natural science and technology and scientific research was increased five times during the last four years which is a favorable precondition and a factor for the development of professional, entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

Expanded coverage of preschool educational institutions is among the priorities of the Government, which will allow to enhance significantly the women’s employment and opportunities for the combination of employment and child care. Parents of children with disabilities are also included in these Programs as beneficiaries. Particularly, around 130 pre-school education institutions in regions and capital are established in the scope of the Education Improvement project implemented with the support of the World Bank, which serves for around 3500 children. These institutions comply
with the requirements ensuring inclusiveness. The number of beneficiaries for the daily childcare services will be increased for more than three times starting for the January, 2020.

Protection of pregnant women and ban on the sex-selective abortions and provision of sexual reproductive healthcare services are another priority of the Government. UNFPA published World Population/ 2017 annual report titled Worlds Apart: Reproductive Health and Rights in an Age of Inequality.6 The report reflects upon the forms and consequences of Inequality in the following areas: maternal mortality, prenatal care, income distribution among population and genders, importance of work and education for men and women, etc. The report presents the positive experience documented in Armenia as the best example of reduction of inequalities related to accessibility of prenatal care and health services. In 2016, Armenia also received the international certificate as a Country that Eliminated Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission.

Excellences,

With all the on-going efforts evidence and data from studies and relevant indices testify that there are a number of limitations en route of women empowerment and gender equality, such as: widespread negative gender stereotypes and traditional practices harmful to women, which are still prevalent in the society. Overall, it is safe to suggest that de jure equality has not yet led to de facto equality and women are still at a disadvantage compared to men in most spheres of life which push us for further actions in this direction. Hopefully, the Conference will be an important milestone fostering the national, regional and global agendas for gender equality via joint effort.

Thank you.