ESCAP Committee on Social Development
Draft National Statement

This session of the Committee on Social Development comes at a pivotal time for the whole UN system, as we begin implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

From Sendai, to Addis, New York and Paris and soon Istanbul the international community agrees we need to work together in more innovative, effective and strategic ways than we have in the past. Social development will be a key means for us to deliver the objectives of these ambitious agendas in the Asia-Pacific.

The challenges our region faces in the 21st century can only be met through co-ordinated efforts across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, and with the full and active participation of all members of society.

Launched in February, Australia’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy applies across all areas of our international engagement. Central to the strategy is recognition that the empowerment of women and girls is vital to promoting sustainable development, economic growth, poverty reduction and security in our region.

We believe the best way to achieve this is through a twin-track approach – with measures specifically designed to tackle gender inequalities while also incorporating gender issues into all aspects of our work.

This holistic approach is at the forefront of Australia’s development policies. For example, our aid program aims to effectively address gender issues in at least 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives.

Demonstrating our commitment to this aim, tackling gender inequality is one of the key pillars of Australia’s campaign for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council in 2018-20.

A major Australian aid initiative, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, is also promoting gender equality across the Pacific region and has a 10-year plan in place to improve the political, economic and societal opportunities of Pacific women.

We must also support regional development that actively includes and benefits people with disabilities. Australia has implemented a new strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in across all sectors of our aid program including infrastructure, education and health.

With one in seven people globally having disabilities, it is essential that countries are able to harness the potential contribution of all citizens, maximising opportunities for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth. In partnership with the UN Statistical Division, Australia is supporting a project to strengthen disability statistics in developing countries to better inform evidence-based policy and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.
Australia recognises that UN development agencies are key partners in achieving all the dimensions of 2030 Agenda in our region. We were pleased to hold our joint High-Level Consultations with five UN funds and programs in February, with productive sessions focusing on innovation, disability, gender, humanitarian response and the unique challenges facing the Pacific region.

A strong, coherent and high-performing UN is fundamental to addressing the development challenges in the Pacific. Small Island Developing States in particular face unique challenges around the implementation, and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

We are working with our Pacific partners to improve data collection and value the long-standing partnership through ESCAP on improving regional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.

We are committed to focussing global attention and innovation on the development challenges facing our regional neighbours. Australia established an “innovationXchange” to identify, test and trial new approaches and partnerships in aid delivery with a special focus on the Pacific.

An example we are particularly proud of is our Pacific Humanitarian Challenge. We had an impressive response from a wide range of participants on how to solve the challenges that we face in responding to natural disasters in the Pacific, and look forward to announcing the winning ideas at the World Humanitarian Summit in May.

We see regional platforms and forums, such as ESCAP, as being key mechanisms to support effective development cooperation and to allow us to reach the targets of the ambitious 2030 Agenda.

We echo the Executive Secretary’s (Dr. Shamshad Akhtar’s) recent thoughts on International Women’s Day: To break through barriers, we must go beyond boundaries, generate new ideas and take bold steps. We look forward to working with all our regional partners to take innovative and concrete action across all sectors of development and work towards equality and prosperity for the people of the Asia-Pacific.

Thank you.