Opening Remarks

Excellency Mr. Qasim Haidari, Deputy Minister of National Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,

Excellency Mr. Md. Enamur Rahman, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief, Bangladesh,

Excellency Mr. Nityanand Rai, Minister of State for Home Affairs (Disaster Management), Government of India,

Excellency Ms. Khadheeja Naseem, Deputy Minister of Environment, Maldives,

Excellency Mr. Malik Amin Aslam Khan, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, Government of Pakistan,

Excellencies, Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Special High-Level Event on Disaster and Climate Resilience in South Asia. We are delighted to see gathering of so many distinguished Ministers and high-ranking policymakers of South Asia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the Asia-Pacific region’s socio-economic fabric and has unveiled the fragility of our interconnected systems.

Yet, with concerted efforts of our member States, there are significant opportunities to build back better and to prepare ourselves to adapt to a more flexible and resilient institutional systems.

With ever-growing body of scientific evidence and knowledge, the issue of disaster and climate resilience is one that impacts all countries and communities alike and has implications that go beyond national boundaries and beliefs.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

ESCAP in partnership with SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), Government of India, has been engaging experts and policymakers around the region to discuss solutions to build resilience to cascading disasters in South Asia and has brought out a report in form of a draft Summary for Policymakers: Weaving a Stronger Fabric: Managing cascading risks for climate resilience in South Asia.

I would like to share two key findings from this synthesis report.

- Biological and natural disasters intersect and interconnect. The region is regularly struck by climate induced events which intersect with biological hazards. The convergence of these hazards with COVID-19 has opened up a whole new risk landscape with compounding effects that have spilled over to numerous social and economic sectors.
- New risk landscape demands a new approach in how we look at and understand resilience. We need to look beyond short- and medium-term risk management to create integrated strategies for reducing disaster risk and building greater resilience.

Let me now highlight four pivotal policy solutions that can support the South Asia sub-region to building back better in the post-COVID-19 era.

First, future disaster planning must engage with more complex and dynamic scenarios. To support member States, ESCAP has undertaken a study on scenario-based risk analytics for managing cascading disasters.
These and more innovations are being used in climate services which use cutting-edge technological research and advances. These now have to be applied for integrated public health and disaster management.

Third, early warning systems have been critical in saving lives and livelihoods. These systems, in both health and disaster management, need to be updated with the latest climate risk information.

We must work synergistically to design policies in dealing comprehensively with multiple and compounded risks and the intersections of vulnerabilities and impacts.

Fourth, harness regional cooperation and promote disaster risk reduction as a public good. In this regard, ESCAP’s Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network (APDRN) supports establishment of integrated multi-hazard early warning systems.

The platform has already delivered multiple knowledge products on systemic and cascading risks within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The South Asia SDG Forum and this Special High-Level Event present an opportunity for collective policy dialogues.

I am confident that your recommendations and outcome of today’s dialogue will provide a basis for a collective commitment to work on a Ministerial Declaration in South Asia.

ESCAP, along with the UN system, will continue to strengthen solidarity, and facilitate the subregional processes and partnerships on Disaster and Climate Resilience to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

I wish you a very successful Special High-Level Event.

Thank you for your attention.

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