Thank you, Chair,

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the ESCAP Secretariat for organizing the 3rd Session of the Committee on Information and Communication Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation.

COVID-19

In response to the questions posed under this agenda item, I would like to share with the Committee the ITU’s collaborative efforts and support to member countries.

The COVID pandemic shed light on various aspects of digital connectivity and digital services. Now the importance of digital connectivity, digital services and capacity building has been widely recognized but at the same time, there is a growing concern that doing more of the same may not be the answer to support the COVID-19 response and recovery.

In that context, ITU has been working with partners to identify the critical pathways to accelerate forward-looking, transformative and evidence-based digital policy and regulatory reforms and partnership building around the common goals of no one left behind and building back better at the same time.

In Thailand, ITU is working with UNESCO and UNICEF to map the digital divide and identify unconnected schools and underserved communities under the leadership of the UN resident coordinator in Thailand. The objective of this study is to establish the baseline for evidence-based interventions and ensure that schools and children have meaningful access to the Internet, devices, e-learning services and capacity support and no children will be left behind in the implementation of e-learning programmes.

I am also pleased to share the ITU-UNICEF global initiative, Giga project which aims to connect schools and communities. The inception webinars were successfully organized in partnership with ADB, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNCDF on 7 and 10 August 2020. Attended by over 160 participants from 30 countries, this webinar serves as a regional platform to mapping of schools, developing access, availability of funding and e-learning solutions.
In the area of Health: In addition to the global platform of Reg4COVID, which shares good practices of ICT responses to COVID pandemics, a joint WHO-ITU initiative in 2012, called Be He@lthy, Be Mobile has made significant progress in developing mHealth services supporting countries by providing technical expertise to effectively implement and sustainably scale mHealth at the national level.

Digital technologies can mitigate the impact not only in management aspect of the pandemic but also in delivering a wide range of these services online. As part of the already ongoing work, the first track countries from the Central Asia include Kazakhstan as the regional lead, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. ITU Regional office for the CIS region is conducting work with these three countries. These are some of the recent examples of ITU support.

ITU looks forward to expanding partnerships and accelerating the efforts to address the challenges posed by COVID jointly.

Thank you, Chair.