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.

**Bridging the digital divide for inclusive broadband access**

ITU is delighted to share with the Committee how ITU is supporting the expansion of networks and infrastructure in the region which is of relevance to the present agenda item.

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.

One of ITU’s work which has been contributing to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) is the ITU-ESCAP transmission map. The update has been taking place with the involvement of member countries and operators for regional and national policy discussion and consensus building.

In addition, *spectrum management* is one of the core areas of ITU’s work. How to enhance the efficient use of frequencies has become a priority across the region in view of the growing demand for mobile applications and data. In addition to the existing demand, the COVID-19 pandemic added additional and urgent needs for reliable services for more users in a wider geographic coverage.

To address the emerging regulatory challenges in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic, ITU in partnership with the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and GSMA organized the webinar “**Digital Transformation for Digital Economies @COVID-19 South Asia**” on 30 July 2020 as part of the 20th Global Symposium for Regulators, with participation from ESCAP. The Webinar highlighted digital strategies and innovative solutions and the need for digital
connectivity in areas like health, education, telework, which have emerged amid the crisis. The Webinar was organized as part of the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-20).

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 order to accelerate the last mile connectivity, ITU is planning to launch the last mile **connectivity guidelines**. Together with the recently launched **Smart Village Blueprint**, the guidelines represent ITU’s concerted and holistic support to connect the unconnected and accelerate the digital inclusion. ITU is working in the region to adopt the Smart Village blueprint to Small Islands Developing States in the form of Smart Islands. The Smart Village project in Niger recently received the funding of $100 million from the World Bank and ITU has been in discussion to replicate the model with interested member countries and partners.

As the ESCAP presentation highlighted, it is time for all of us to collaborate and create synergies so as to collectively advance towards the goal of no one left behind in COVID response and recovery and building back better.

Thank you, Chair.