Speech: by H.E Boros Samheng:
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen
Thank you, Madame Chair,

Firstly, I would like to thank UNESCAP on organising this session today with a special thanks to the Social Development Division; Mr. Srinivas Tata and Mr. Patrick Anderson. I think both of you have been the backbone of our work on the Action Plan for Social Protection within our Asia Pacific region.

As a Cambodian delegate, I was able to chair an ESCAP-Cambodian Consultation Session in June last year and what we came to realise is that we definitely need this UNESCAP Action Plan to move forward after this conference so our national committees can give due consideration to the development strategies. I believe the meeting last year was the moment we realised that the level of expenditure within our region was well under the global average and that there is much work to be done to close this gap.

There was also a study carried out by UNESCAP which evaluated that Cambodia could reach this target if we increased our expenditure towards social protection to 11 per cent of GDP (as per global average). This would enhance our ability to lift everyone out of poverty by 2030. This UNESCAP evaluation and subsequent recommendations were an important landmark for us here in Cambodia and has motivated us enormously towards our objective to eradicate poverty in Cambodia.

On this basis and as the leader of the Cambodian delegation to this conference, I believe that Cambodia has much to share as the nation is currently developing a national social protection framework with the recent establishment of a Social Protection Council which allows us to now move forward with the next steps towards a more comprehensive national social protection support system.

We were so pleased to be able to utilise the social assistance and social protection schemes in order to respond to the COVID-19 crisis noting that this level of social support was unprecedented in Cambodia and as a result we are able to address the urgent needs of a significant percentage of the population that were vulnerable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is simple and easy to explain; In Cambodia we have 30 percent of the population that is under 18, we have 10 percent of the population aged over 60 and we have reliably estimated that 10 percent of the total population are formal workers, and 50 percent of the population are informal workers.

The formal worker support was not problematic as we were able to deal with the economic realities and maintain a social security scheme which was previously implemented as part of
the already formally adopted strategy of investing an expanded expenditure towards the national social protection framework,

The informal worker is we are having some problems however we successfully dealt with the problems and Cambodia was able to respond very quickly to the COVID-19 outbreak as we fast tracked the proposed cash transferal support program and were able to provide support within one month of the COVID-19 outbreak to the 20% of Cambodia’s population who were in vulnerable circumstances.

Therefore, Cambodia was able to provide COVID-19 relief support to almost 3 million Cambodians from a total population of 15 million. It pleases me to be able to share this experience and to stress how important it is for a nation to have effective social protection schemes and social assistance programs that can be implemented successfully under all circumstances.

As the leader of the delegation from Cambodia, I acknowledge the crucial importance of the Asian Pacific nations to work together in solidarity in order to not only combat the virus and its severe negative impacts but to also ensure a much needed economic revival to assist people to return to employment and to ensure their physical and mental well-being along with continuing the path of successful development within the Asia Pacific region.

We need to maintain our 2030 poverty alleviation target so that no one is left behind and to continue to develop effective programs of social protection and social assistance for all people within our region.

Therefore, Cambodia is delighted to endorse the ESCAP agenda items for this conference being the Draft Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection along with endorsing the proposed Asia Pacific Indicator Framework for the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Thank you, Madame chair.