Madame Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide ILO’s perspective on the importance of regional cooperation on social protection.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed again the devastating socioeconomic consequences of systemic shocks in the absence of universal and adequate social protection. Recovery will only be sustained and future crises mitigated if countries progressively build comprehensive and shock-responsive social protection systems, including floors, in line with human rights and ILO social security standards.

Social security is a human right. However, about half of the region’s population has no social protection coverage, and only a handful of countries have comprehensive social protection systems with relatively broad coverage.

Workers in the informal economy and women are overrepresented among those excluded. Workers, employers and governments are confronted by these long-standing challenges, compounded by other challenges arising including from climate change, public health emergencies, population ageing, labour migration and digitalization. The responsiveness of social protection systems to life and work transitions, and systemic shocks, is an essential complement to employment policies to respond better to the call of the ILO’s Centenary Declaration for a human-centred future of work.

To make the right to social security a reality for all, it is necessary to: i) develop national social protection strategies underpinned by political and budgetary
commitments and legal frameworks; ii) implement both contributory and non-contributory schemes that are gender-responsive and protect people from lifecycle risks and co-variate systemic shocks; and iii) improve the financial and administrative governance of social protection systems.

In this context, the importance of regional cooperation cannot be overestimated. It needs to be recognized as a key development cooperation modality for the promotion of Decent Work for All and a strategic vehicle for promoting mutually beneficial learning and cooperation in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Therefore, the ILO stands ready to support the Action Plan, both at the regional and national levels.

At the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the International Labour Organization we share a common view on the critical importance of social protection.

That is why we have again joined forces to produce the regional report “The Protection We Want – Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific” which was recently launched on 15 October. This report clearly strengthens the regional evidence base and moves the agenda forward on social protection in the region.

The basic commitment to work together at the regional and the country levels so that sustainable development and social protection is available to all, with no one left behind, is the way forward in our challenging times.

Thank you