KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. DAMDIN TSOGTBAATAR, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MONGOLIA AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SEVENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

09.10-09.20 am, 27 May 2019, at the UNCC

Excellencies,

Madame Executive Secretary,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express our deepest gratitude to the Royal Thai Government and people of Thailand for their warm welcome extended to me and my delegation.

I thank you all for the confidence placed in me and the great honour that you have bestowed on my country and on me. Together with my colleagues the Honourable Vice-Chairs, I shall endeavor to do my very best to discharge the responsibilities of serving as your Chair with the support of the ESCAP Secretariat.

Please allow me to say few words at this time. ESCAP is a unique intergovernmental platform. It is the only platform in Asia and the Pacific that covers all the United Nations Member States. It also has the unique ability to
integrate and synergize sound analysis with intergovernmental deliberations, leading to normative outcomes and technical cooperation.

ESCAP has continuously contributed to the development of the region and has played an important role in addressing the key socio-economic challenges facing the region, identifying common priorities and setting the regional agenda for action by providing its valuable guidance. I wish to thank the Secretariat for its report on “Closing the gap: Empowerment and Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific”. The report provided new insights to policymakers by identifying options to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality in Asia and the Pacific in three key areas of socio-economic development, namely education, decent work and income.

Over the recent years, Asia and the Pacific has turned into the fastest growing region in the world. The region is home to 60 percent of the world’s population and it accounts for some 40 percent of global exports and 35 percent of global imports. With the economic growth, the region is facing considerable challenges such as rising inequalities in income, wealth and opportunities within countries.

Considering the most important notion of SDG “No one left behind”, it is timely and appropriate that the 75th Session of ESCAP is being held under the theme of People’s Empowerment and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality. This session gives us opportunity to accelerate the pace of implementation, shape
policies and integrate the national strategies to reduce gap between rich and poor and threats from climate change.

I wish to assure Ms. Alisjhabana that we, the members of ESCAP, will work hand-in-hand with the Secretariat to promote inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific and she will have my full cooperation as Chair of the 75th Session.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

The Government of Mongolia prioritizes the need to provide our people with better access to social and economic opportunities. Economically, Mongolia is experiencing a positive momentum. Our economic growth was 6.9 percent in 2018 and is forecasted to maintain its pace in the coming years. Total foreign trade turnover reached 12.9 billion USD, a 22 percent of increase from the previous year. FDI inflow also showed a significant increase of 18 percent from the previous year and reached 2.47 billion USD.

However, if we look at these figures from the social perspective, wealth generated by economic growth is not evenly distributed, especially in rural areas. Lack of equal opportunities, poverty and severe winters are forcing many rural inhabitants to migrate to the capital. Currently, more than half of our population lives in Ulaanbaatar. They migrate to capital to seek better education, decent jobs and stable incomes but because of lack of work skills
and qualified education, most of them find it hard to adjust to a new life in the city.

Due to the growth of urban population, social challenges such as housing, air pollution, infrastructure, traffic and over-crowded schools have become the most pressing issues facing us in recent years. Therefore, with a view to mitigating citizens’ inflow from rural areas and closing the rural-urban gap, the Government of Mongolia has started to implement three-pace policies: three-pillar development policy 2018-2020, midterm policies 2020-2025 and 2025-2030.

Currently, my Government’s main development policy comprises three strategies, which include “Multi-pillar Economic Development policy”, “Stable, Accountable and Disciplined Governance promoting Justice” and “Human-centered Social Policy”. Mongolia aims to diversify its economy in the framework of its Multi-pillar economic development policy. We consider light industry, food export, tourism and infrastructure as our main economic sectors besides mining and heavy industry. Moreover, my Government attaches high priority to establishing justice in society and strengthening the rule of law, improving discipline and responsibility, ensuring transparency in public service, increasing workplaces to reduce poverty and paying more attention to public health and social issues.

With a view to overcoming development challenges, landlocked geographical location, and decentralizing economic gains, Mongolia aims to turn itself into a
transit country. To this end, we have taken concrete actions to build connectivity with regional economies and concluded a number of agreements in this respect. The Program on establishing economic corridor between Mongolia, China and Russia approved by Presidents of three countries in 2016, sets the basic principles, mechanisms and priority projects for the Economic Corridor and we currently work on practical implementation of the Program as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Furthermore, the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network was established between Mongolia, China and Russia with support of ESCAP in 2016, which opened up new trade prospects for businesses and better connectivity for people in rural and remote areas. At the moment, we are planning to implement a number of projects within the framework of Mongolia-Russia-China Economic Corridor Program, conduct feasibility studies on building the natural gas pipeline from Russia to China through Mongolian territory and commence the feasibility study for the Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Mongolia, as a country with vast territory, can certainly contribute to the regional energy supply and in particular, renewable energy supply. The President of Mongolia called upon the prompt commencement of the North East Asian Super Grid project which can share that load during peak hours that will be a resource-efficient and optimal solution for supplying Northeast Asian countries with energy. I am pleased to announce that Mongolia and China are
starting a joint project for energy complex and high-voltage transmission line. The complex will comprise stations with an installed capacity of 5350 MW from solar, wind and coal sources, while its research and feasibility study had already been completed.

We expect that the implementation of the above-mentioned transport, logistical and energy initiatives would result in building more infrastructures and creation of jobs with decent salaries that would be conducive to development of rural areas by narrowing the development gap.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I am pleased to inform here that Mongolia is going to present the first Voluntary National Review of the implementation of SDGs at the High-level Political forum on Sustainable Development to be held in New York this July. We had previously presented 5 reports on Millennium Development Goals. Our very first review on SDGs takes air-pollution as a key example of challenging issue and it highlights that inequality remains a serious challenge that undermines the durability of development gains. In particular, the review will stress the importance of policy coherence, institutionalizing implementation across government ministries and levels, as well as setting up monitoring and evaluation systems to report on the progress.
Considering the core principle of the SDG - "leave no one behind", the review identifies vulnerable groups such as women, youth, the disabled and low-income citizens of population that are at risk of being left behind in Mongolia. We assume that the review would become a crucial platform to deepen SDG awareness across stakeholders and strengthen consensus around the criticality of cross-sector, coherent and coordinated action.

In conclusion, Mongolia remains committed to achieve SDGs by 2030. The Agenda 2030 has taken action to localize them putting in place its own Sustainable Development Vision, as well as regulatory and institutional frameworks for SDG planning, in addition to developing methods for SDG-informed budgeting. Therefore, we need to pay particular attention to their means of implementation including financing for development, technology transfers, trade facilitation in our context, regional economic cooperation and integration.

I would now like to officially declare the Seventy-Fifth Commission Session of the ESCAP open. I look forward to fruitful and constructive discussions during this session.

I thank you.