Bismillahir Rahmaa Nir Rahiim.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

Honourable Chairman,
Excellencies,
Madam Executive Secretary of the United Nations ESCAP,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would begin with expressing sincere gratitude to the United Nations ESCAP and the Royal Thai Government for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to us during this Commission.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Brunei Darussalam supports the convergence of this year’s theme for the Commission and Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development with the theme for the 2019 High-level Political Forum.
Empowerment and inclusion are important tools in tackling inequality. By providing access to basic opportunities, such as education, health or sustainable income, people in situations where they are marginalized; or face high income inequality; or poverty are able to progress to better circumstances. They are able to earn an income that is sustainable and sufficient to provide for themselves, and in turn, are empowered to improve their circumstances.

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In our journey towards achieving the national vision *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, Brunei Darussalam focuses on strategies and policies that help us achieve the three goals, namely having an (i) educated, highly skilled and accomplished people; (ii) high quality of life; and (iii) a dynamic and sustainable economy. As was highlighted during last year’s session, inequality in access to opportunities restricts social mobility. Thus, Brunei Darussalam continues to place great emphasis on ensuring policies are inclusive such that its citizens’ well-being, health and education are taken care of and remain at a high level.

Universal health coverage is at the cornerstone of Brunei Darussalam’s health policies, where we ensure that all levels of society have the same access to quality health services anytime and anywhere, without being financially burdened. Brunei Darussalam recently launched a National Mental Helpline due to increasing awareness regarding mental health. Brunei’s life expectancy at birth of 77.8 years exceeds the average life expectancy at birth of the global population in 2016. There are currently 16 doctors per 10,000 population. Our immunisation coverage has consistently
remained above 95.0 per cent for all vaccinations in a programme and meets targets set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Brunei Darussalam continues to invest in the physical and mental health of its citizens which are all vital to a country's development.

Furthermore, Brunei Darussalam ensures universal access to education, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. The *Miftaahun Najaah* (Key to Success) Scheme, administered by the Ministry of Education, provides financial assistance to students from low income backgrounds so that their basic needs are met. This, among others, allow those from disadvantaged backgrounds to climb up the so-called socio-economic ladder.

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Based on the 2017 Labour Force Survey, Brunei Darussalam's unemployment rate is at 9.3 per cent. The unemployment rate for youth (aged 15 to 24 years) is 28.9 per cent. With this situation in mind, Brunei Darussalam is actively implementing initiatives and programmes to reduce the unemployment rate, particularly among the youth. One such initiative is in driving the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which play an important role not just for economic development but also in job creation, thus providing income and alleviating poverty. In ASEAN member states, SMEs account for between 51.7 per cent to 97.2 per cent of total employment. In this regard, Brunei Darussalam embraces a whole-of-nation approach encompassing initiatives to drive youth entrepreneurship in the country. Darussalam Enterprise (DARe), is the national SME body and has the primary goal of supporting the growth
of SMEs in Brunei. DARe has implemented various programs and initiatives, such as through provision of capacity building programmes, securing funding by venture capitalists, provision of industrial land and complexes, as well as growth outside of Brunei. These efforts have resulted in an increase in the number of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in the Non-Oil and Gas Sector by 8 per cent.

The National Master Plan and the National Action Plan under the National Council on Social Issues, spearheaded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS), addresses the issue of rising unemployment and social problems in the country. In its efforts to address unemployment among the able-bodied and able-to-work recipients of the monthly welfare assistance from MCYS, the Ministry focuses on providing programmes that increase employability and provide entrepreneurship skills to give welfare recipients opportunities to be independent and escape poverty. For example, the Ministry has implemented two pilot projects that has successfully provided employment to welfare assistance recipients, as well as dependents of the monthly welfare assistance recipients. Other programs include those where welfare recipients are given opportunities to study in vocational and technical centres where they are able to learn technical skills.

Additionally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs conducts various programmes that focus on entrepreneurship to empower the poor and destitute who qualify to receive alms. For example, it recently organized a 15-month programme that provided training in both conventional and agribusiness concepts to alms recipients who possess the drive to change their lives. Post-programme assistance, in the form of advice and assistance in securing items such as fertilizer and equipment, is also provided.
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognising the increasing need to address inequalities, ESCAP continues to play an important role towards "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" through encouraging empowerment and equal access to opportunities for greater social mobility and thus, reduce inequality and address poverty.

As such, Brunei Darussalam joins the global community in addressing rising inequalities in income, access, opportunities and resources. We fully support the Commission's continuous hard work in ensuring the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and we commend the Commission’s ongoing endeavours.

Thank you.