Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

Your Excellency the Chairman, Executive Secretary, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Hong Kong, China (HKC) delegation, I congratulate the Government of Thailand and the ESCAP Secretariat on the very successful organization of this meeting. I am also grateful to the Government and people of Thailand for the very warm hospitality extended to us.

3. In the 2019-20 financial year, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government’s recurrent spending on social welfare reached HK$84.3 billion (US$10.9 billion), or 19.1% of the total recurrent government expenditure of the same year. In fact, this figure has almost doubled as compared with that in the 2012-13 financial year, demonstrating the HKSAR Government’s staunch commitment on the well-being of our citizens.

4. The general principle underpinning our welfare system is to help underprivileged people capable of working by offering them opportunities to become self-reliant and improve their livelihood while devoting public resources to those who cannot provide for themselves.

5. This principle is manifested in our different systems. Taking our social security as an example. In Hong Kong, we have put in place a non-contributory social security system to provide assistance to people in need, which includes the safety net (we call it the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme) for those who cannot support themselves financially for reasons such as old age, disability, unemployment, single parenthood, etc. At the same time, it encourages and supports people capable of working to achieve self-reliance through job training and counselling.

6. The self-reliance spirit of Hong Kong people is reflected in the continuous decrease of unemployment cases under the CSSA Scheme over the years: the latest statistics show that the number of such cases has decreased for 10 consecutive years to a 20-year low, with a drop of about 80% from its peak.
7. In June 2018, we have also introduced the Higher Old Age Living Allowance under the social security system. It provides a monthly payment of HK$3,585 (US$460) after a simple and relatively lenient means test. This new Scheme is now benefitting about 500,000 elderly persons, representing around 40 per cent of our elderly population.

8. The principle of self-reliance and targeted use of public resources also stands out prominently in our Working Family Allowance Scheme. We are aware that there are households working for hours but are still prone to poverty because of the relatively low income and the need to support their children. To this end, the Government launched the Scheme in May 2016 as a pro-employment and pro-children initiative to encourage self-reliance through employment and ease intergenerational poverty. Apart from providing payment for households fulfilling the working hour requirements, a Child Allowance is especially granted to each eligible child or youth in the household. We believe that giving these poor children or young members more means for learning opportunities will promote the younger generation's upward mobility. We introduced some major improvements to the Scheme in 2018, which include relaxing the application criteria and raising the rates of allowances. We hope the Scheme will benefit more working households.

9. Looking ahead, the HKSAR Government will continue to work with all sectors to improve the well-being of the disadvantaged.