Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Pakistan delegation, I would like to commend Executive Secretary Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana for her visionary stewardship of our collective work here at ESCAP. The high-level participation in the Session clearly manifests the importance attached by member states to this organization.

Let me also appreciate the excellent work done by the ESCAP Secretariat for successful organization of the Commission Session.

Mr. Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,

74 years have passed since the “people of the United Nations” underlined their determination in the United Nations Charter to affirm faith “in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”, and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”.

However, despite rapid economic growth, development and technological innovations over the last seven decades, millions of people across the globe are still toiling in poverty. Social, economic and gender inequalities abound. Marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women, disabled and elderly, remain the subaltern part of societies.

In this backdrop, the theme of this session “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” is most timely and appropriate, also consistent with the forthcoming global discussions in New York.

My delegation welcomes the Theme Study “Closing the Gap: Empowerment and Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific”. The report rightly identifies and explores the linkages between and among sustainable development, poverty, empowerment,
equality, and inclusiveness in the Asia Pacific region. We appreciate the efforts that have gone in to produce this excellent document.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

The Theme Study presents a somber picture of prevalent socio-economic realities in the Asia Pacific region. Despite important gains made in lifting people out of poverty, inclusive and equitable development is impeded by unequal opportunities based on gender, education, physical status, and geographical location.

Adoption of the SDGs rekindled the hopes of achieving a more equitable world. These goals carry forward the unfinished agenda of MDGs, and apart from being more holistic, place special emphasis on social and economic inclusion.

Whereas the call to leave no one behind offers glimmering optimism, it also presents daunting challenges. These challenges emanate from the structural impediments within societies as well as risks posed by regional and international dynamics.

We concur with the analysis that inclusion and empowerment can lead to equality. To achieve that, an enabling environment has to be in place.

We believe that empowerment has to be multi-dimensional and embrace the economic and political realities at national, regional, and international levels.

Empowerment would contribute towards an equitable and inclusive society and sustainable development if countries foster self-reliance among disadvantaged groups, build their capacity and skill-sets, address the structural and societal obstacles impeding their full involvement in the society, and promote participation and autonomy in decision-making processes.

Importantly, the Theme Study confirms that economic growth and level of income of a country alone would not translate into equality. Effective policies, legislative frameworks and strong institutions are required to ensure that growth and development are more inclusive and equitably benefit the poor and vulnerable sections of society.
Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Pakistan has aligned SDGs with its national policies, plans and the long-term development framework “Vision 2025”.

Primary focus of the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan is on development, social justice, empowerment, and inclusion.

A number of steps have been taken to foster social and financial inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for the marginalized and disempowered, provision of educational opportunities, and access to livelihood and social safety nets.

Through laws, policies and strategies, concerted efforts are being made at national and provincial levels to address gender inequality and foster women economic empowerment and entrepreneurship.

The Government is committed to boosting trade, promote economic growth, and safeguard a decent standard of living for all. More jobs are to be created through structural transformation, industry orientation, skills building of youth and focus on SMEs, IT, Tourism and Agriculture sectors, as well as major infrastructure programs.

It is a priority of the Government to ensure universal social protection and financial inclusion for all. A Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Division has been established for aligning and integrating various poverty alleviation and social protection initiatives.

BISP remains the flagship initiative with a vision to elevate the status of marginalized and underprivileged sections of society, especially women, through the establishment of comprehensive social protection net.

The Government has also recently launched a targeted poverty alleviation programme called “Ehsas” or feeling.

The Prime Minister’s Youth Programme entails a broad canvas of schemes aimed at enabling youth and the underprivileged to access employment opportunities through skills development, higher education, and Information Technology.
More resources are being allocated to improve access, equity, and quality of basic and college education. Investment is being made in physical infrastructure, upgradation of educational institutions and opening of new facilities, especially for technical and vocational education.

In CPEC, we are entering the next phase with greater emphasis on socio-economic uplift, poverty alleviation, agricultural cooperation and industrial development.

Through these people-centric policies, Pakistan has made considerable progress in implementing the 2030 Development Agenda, especially regarding the inclusion and empowerment of women - a fact also documented in the Theme Study.

We are cognizant that many challenges remain which need more attention. We are committed to overcome them and implement the 2030 Development Agenda

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

The message from this Session is loud and clear. We must act, and act together. Development does not happen in silos. We all have to play our part and collaborate to create synergies.

ESCAP is an excellent platform for policy dialogue, sharing of experiences and best practices and consolidating our efforts to advance our shared objectives. Pakistan will continue to support ESCAP and work together with all members to build an inclusive, resilient and sustainable future for Asia and the Pacific.

I thank you.

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