Mr Chairman
Executive Secretary ESCAP
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies & Gentlemen

It is an honour to present Samoa’s statement on the occasion of the 75th ESCAP Commission session; the thematic focus of which is to consider ways, by which we can close the gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged and ensure that “equality” is realised. The question is, how has multilateralism assisted to close the gap so that no one, is left behind!

Samoa reaffirms its commitment to promote and uphold equality, including of opportunities through the empowerment of all vulnerable groups including women, youth and persons with disabilities and that they are placed at the centre of all national policy making and programming. Samoa has ratified five of the nine core human rights conventions and made many other international and global commitments. At the presentation of its first voluntary national review report in 2016 Samoa made an undertaking that it would take a human rights approach to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. To ensure the localisation of the relevant international agenda and inclusive, sustainable development we have taken an integrated approach with the alignment of the Agenda 2030, SAMOA pathway, Paris Agreement, Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Pacific framework for Regionalism to our national development strategy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a perfect frame for understanding how the pursuit of peace and security, development, and human rights are all intimately related.
No commitment to inclusion would be complete without a concerted effort to further empower women and engage with youth. The slow but steady progress on women’s participation in the state and in society serves as a key example of the transformative power of inclusion in building responsive states and effective governance. Implementing and building on past and present successes should remain at the heart of multilateral priorities. Much can also be gained through empowering, supporting, and engaging global youth. Youth are potential partners in working for peace, human rights, and sustainable development and should be engaged as such.

Some of the obstacles that still stand in the way of genuine inclusion of these critical stakeholders could be addressed by looking at increases and the quality of funding. Predictability and flexibility of funding are key to making programs and activities efficient and sustainable. Donors should also shift toward using financing mechanisms that encourage joint initiatives and cooperation among multilateral agencies and departments, rather than competition and fragmentation.

Increased awareness of violence against women, growing support for women’s empowerment, and more understanding about the links between inclusivity and development offer a unique opportunity to accelerate action toward bringing more women into the mainstream of decision making and sustaining peace at all levels.

Adopting a unified, holistic, and coherent approach can break silos and such an opportunity exists in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The inclusion of a target on eliminating all forms of violence against women within Goal 5 on gender equality, as well as Goal 16 on “peaceful and inclusive societies,” can unify national and international efforts to improve women’s security. They also send a clear signal that gender equality matters for both peace and development.

Multilateral processes should prioritise women and youth’s inclusion given that they represent more than half of their population. Multilateral
actors should evaluate whether communities are routinely consulted and their perspectives taken into account. There should also be increased accountability for gender equality programming as accountability for women’s participation affects the legitimacy of the multilateral system as a whole, from headquarters to the community level.

There is a need to translate normative frameworks, both literally and culturally through the translation of the policies and practices of the women, peace, and security agenda into accessible resources in many languages that would allow them to reach a broader audience. Further, by interpreting the agenda according to local customs or through the lens of religious norms and community leaders can better harness the potential of the women, youth, people with disability in their work for progressive change.

Mr Chairman, Samoa’s National Policy for Gender 2016-2020 acknowledges that Gender Equality and Equity are requisites to achieving the goals for the Strategy for the Development of Samoa and the goals and aspirations of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The policy identifies the critical areas of support, partnerships and attention of all sectors of government, village based groups, civil society partners, development partner agencies, various target groups of women and men, that are required towards effective implementation and having the greatest impact. This framework has informed the development of gender-sensitive legislation, policies and resource mobilization towards targeted population that need it the most.

The SAMOA Pathway is the blueprint for sustainable development amongst Small Island Developing states. Specific emphasis is on inclusive and equitable growth, “reducing inequalities”, promoting gender equality, and “fostering equitable social development and inclusion”. Similarly the Framework for Pacific Regionalism places emphasis on inclusiveness, effective prioritisation and the importance of a strengthened collective approach towards development.
Chairperson, the Samoa Government with the help of its bilateral and multilateral development partners has looked at a series of mechanisms to reduce the economic vulnerability of women, young people and people with disability, through support for TVET learning opportunities, entrepreneurship and pathways to jobs. The Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) has developed competency based qualifications for non-formal learning, enabling early school leavers to receive a qualification and obtain better employment for the betterment of themselves and their families. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labour (MCIL), has also established a Job Seeker’s tool through its website for unemployed persons to register and outline their skills for easy access by employers seeking workers.

Under the leadership of our Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC), there has been an expansion of inclusive education practices in schools, across Samoa. This has seen a steady increase of children with disabilities enrolling in regular schools which in turn are supported with a competent workforce and additional resources.

Under bilateral trade agreements as well as bilateral development cooperation, labour mobility programs have become a win-win for partner countries such as Australia and NZ and sending countries like Samoa. A staged expansion across the Pacific will help fill labour shortages in host countries and provide additional opportunities for Samoan workers to earn income and develop skills in fields beyond agriculture. More and more women are being selected for such schemes.

Similarly Samoa is happy to be part of the new initiative to advance women’s entrepreneurship in Asia-Pacific by ESCAP, with financial support from Global Affairs Canada. Women who establish businesses have the potential to achieve economic independence, overcome extreme poverty and improve the well-being of their families and communities. However, many women entrepreneurs face major disadvantages in accessing sufficient finance and technology that prevent them from achieving their full potential. This project seeks to address such challenges through a holistic, multi-pronged approach integrating innovative finance, technology and policy. It
will empower women entrepreneurs in the region by utilizing innovative financing mechanisms and providing access to technology.

The Women Leadership in Samoa (WILS) partnership with UNDP and UN Women provides training opportunities for women’s participation in leadership pathways and promoting political inclusivity with legal training support for women parliamentarians. The Samoa Women Shaping Development Programme funded by the Government of Australia continues to provide entrepreneurial/business management trainings delivered through a local partner as well as access to start up grants to establish micro businesses.

In February this year, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative for the Pacific was launched in Apia, a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality and women’s empowerment as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion Chairperson, while there is still more work to be done, Samoa remains committed to exploring more effective, concrete and reliable approaches on the ground with key partners and stakeholders. We must work collaboratively and in partnership with the UN community as well as capitalise on the opportunities presented by the existing ESCAP platforms and the overall multilateral framework. Thank you.