Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I extend Sri Lanka’s appreciation to Madam Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of UNESCAP and her team for facilitating the 75th Commission Session, with a timely topic of addressing the issue of empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in relation to achieving the SDGs.

Mr. Chairman,
The theme for our discussion is critical to the process of realising sustainable development. Policies and actions that ensure inclusion and equality in access to assets, capabilities and opportunities, and those that strengthen social cohesion, are vital in ensuring a sustainable future.

With the objective of having greater skills and opportunities, Sri Lanka has introduced a number of policies and strategies which include 13 years education being compulsory, together with expanding and promoting vocational training facilities to provide more capacity to our youth in order to be able to better secure employment domestically and globally.

These initiatives have played a significant role in mitigating the barriers to access basic services and economic opportunities by the people living in the different regions and poverty pockets of the country.

Further, with the programme for inclusive settlements, the government has introduced to ensure access to affordable housing facilities for every family and a number of affordable incentives covering various segment of the population.

I wish to record that Sri Lanka has achieved universal coverage in the supply of electricity and now focusing on diversifying our energy sources particularly to enable higher electricity production from renewable sources. Safe water for drinking and enhanced sanitation facilities for all are also nearing achievement.
The impacts of climate change are a major obstacle for sustained economic growth and development. Therefore, the government has incorporated Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approach into the country's development plan, while focusing to develop adaptive social protection schemes. In addition, fiscal measures especially in terms of taxation were introduced to promote fuel-efficient vehicles, in keeping with EURO 4 standards.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka has made significant steps towards lifting people out of poverty. Further, the theme of the budget 2019, was “Empowering the People and Nurturing the Poor”. Additionally, while facilitating investments in large-scale industries, “Enterprise Sri Lanka” a loan scheme is in progress to develop small and medium entrepreneurs island wide, based on available resources and capabilities of the people.

Having acknowledged the necessity to bridge the income inequality, the government has announced its intention to improve the ratio of direct/indirect taxes to 40/60 level from the existing level of approximately 16/84 in 2017.

The government is also in the process of introducing new technologies to the management of the court system. The enforcement of existing legislation to avoid violence against women, girls and children has been further strengthened. In addition, all forms of child labour have been prohibited and child rights are well protected by law.

**Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The different goals and targets will however present degrees of challenge and ambition. To achieve them at a global level, requires a truly supportive economic environment, enhanced investment flows, a fair and supportive multilateral trade regime for different countries depending on their present state of development and other national circumstances.

In this context, Sri Lanka looks forwarded to further cooperating with ESCAP in carrying out the Government’s vision in achieving the Agenda 2030 to its fullest.

Thank You!