Hong Kong, China’s Statement for
77th Session of the United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Building back better from crises through regional cooperation
in Asia and the Pacific

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 organisation of this meeting, despite we are battling another viral wave in the past two weeks.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic is spreading far and wide around the globe. Despite the rollout of vaccination worldwide, the road to recovery still remains long and bumpy. The pandemic and the resulting economic turmoil, together with the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, have taken a distressing toll on us. Regional cooperation is therefore imperative to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and support post-pandemic recovery efforts.

3. As a Founding Member of the World Trade Organization and a separate customs territory, Hong Kong, China (HKC) is committed to maintaining our free market policy and supporting progressive trade liberalisation. During this critical time, it is of utmost importance to keep our boundaries open and refrain from erecting unjustified trade barriers or resorting to irrationality in trade policies so as to maintain international trade and supply chain resilience as well as ensure the smooth movement of essential goods.

4. Domestically, HKC has been adopting a comprehensive multi-pronged and co-ordinated approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of the community, while maintaining HKC’s position as an international city and logistics hub. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government adopts the following three key principles in combating the pandemic – responding promptly, staying alert to the situation, and working in an open and transparent manner.

5. Our “suppress and lift” strategy, with bold measures on vaccination, testing and detection, social distancing, quarantine
arrangements, travel and border control, is constantly adjusted according to the actual situation of the pandemic and views from experts and stakeholders.

6. After the year-long combating with the pandemic, our measures have proven to be successful. The HKSAR Government now begins to adopt a new direction in fighting the pandemic to restore the city to normality in a gradual and orderly manner, which will be achieved by elucidating the adjustment of various anti-epidemic measures with "vaccine bubble" as the basis.

7. The HKSAR Government is implementing a territory-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme free of charge for all HKC residents and has joined the COVID19 vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX Facility) led by the World Health Organization to procure vaccine doses as a form of safety net to cater for the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the society. The HKSAR Government has already procured about 22.5 million doses of vaccine from various vaccine developers and the goal is to procure sufficient doses to serve at least two times the population. In addition, a free "LeaveHomeSafe" COVID-19 exposure notification mobile app was launched to encourage the public to voluntarily keep a more precise record of their whereabouts, minimising the risk of further transmission of the virus.

8. In safeguarding the economy, our priority is to strengthen resilience, maintain market and financial stability and restore growth. The HKSAR Government is undertaking prompt measures to help businesses stay afloat, keep workers in employment, relieve financial burdens of individuals and businesses and assist the economy to recover. To this end, we have implemented various relief measures and pledged over HK$300 billion (about US$38.5 billion and 11% of HKC’s annual GDP) to help offset the economic fallout from COVID-19.

9. As one of the important initiatives of re-opening borders for seamless travel under the pandemic, HKC has been exploring bilateral talks with various economies in the region. A travel-bubble mechanism between Singapore and HKC has been worked out by both sides since November 2020. Subject to the pandemic control and vaccination rates in HKC and Singapore, we look forward to proceeding with implementation of the travel-bubble arrangement with Singapore as soon as possible. HKC stands ready to re-open discussion on future travel-bubble arrangements with other economies at bilateral level.
10. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought us unprecedented challenges last year. It is now high time to turn to a new chapter and revive with full strength. Given the challenges ahead, there is no room for isolation and protectionism. HKC is glad to share our experiences today and stands ready to join hands with all economies to contribute to the economic recovery in the region and ride over the challenges unitedly.