

**Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP**

Remarks (as prepared for delivery)

79th session of the Commission

Policy Statement

**Monday, 15 May 2023
09:30-12:00 hrs. Bangkok time
ESCAP Hall, UNCC**

Excellency, the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Cook Islands and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum,

Excellency Mr. Surangel S. Whipps, Jr., President of Palau,

Excellency, Ms. Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Samoa,

Excellency, Honourable Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Tourism of Tonga, and Chair of the seventy-ninth session,

Excellency Mr. Vijavat Isarabhakdi, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honor to welcome you today to the opening of the seventy-ninth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

We stand today at the midpoint for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Globally as well as regionally, progress toward meeting the targets contained in the 2030 Agenda has been limited. In fact, the number of people living in extreme poverty and facing hunger has increased. Inequalities continue to grow.

Despite improved access to affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) and strengthened industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), **our region stands decades away from the full attainment of the Goals.**

The theme of this session is “Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda declared that “climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and **its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development.**”

Emissions continue to rise, with the concentration of carbon dioxide now at its highest. Changes in weather patterns have reduced agricultural productivity. Extreme weather, including recently set record temperatures, affects human health and limits productivity.

Each one of us and every aspect of our world is being affected. Those who are most exposed and have the fewest resources to respond, however, are the most vulnerable. **Climate change disproportionately affects those without the means to escape its impacts.**

To address this threat, the 2030 Agenda called for international **cooperation** to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and address adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

It called for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13) by strengthening resilience to climate-related hazards and natural disasters; integrating climate change measures into national policies; and improving institutional capacity for climate change mitigation, adaptation and early warning.

Since its universal goals and targets are both integrated and indivisible, the 2030 Agenda also called for:

- Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1) by building the resilience of those in vulnerable situations and reducing their exposure to climate-related extreme events.
- Ending hunger, achieving food security and promoting sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) by promoting resilient agricultural practices, maintaining ecosystems and improving land and soil quality.
- Making cities and human settlements safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11) by implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, mitigation and adaptation and resilience to disasters.

These measures are especially important not only for low-lying coastal countries but also for many least developed countries and small island developing States.

Focus must furthermore be placed on women, youths and marginalized communities, including persons with disabilities.

The integrated nature of climate change calls for holistic, multisectoral solutions as well as targeted support:

- Countries must meet their nationally determined contributions;
- Intensified development of climate-sensitive technology as well as a policy environment supporting both industrial diversification as well as low-emission transport are critical;
- Given the region's energy needs, renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean energy technology must take center-stage and coupled with investment in energy infrastructure.

To address climate change, the Bangkok Declaration adopted by the Commission last year highlighted the need to mobilize financial resources and promote the transfer of environmentally sound technology through enhanced regional cooperation and on mutually agreed terms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and foster climate-resilient development.^[1]

If we are unable to address climate change, **sustainable development will continue to elude us.**

Distinguished delegates,

^[1] Bangkok Declaration Commemorating the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: a Common Agenda to Advance Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/RES/78/1).

It is increasingly clear that the attainment of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific requires urgent actions.

Since the pandemic, the SDG financing gap has only widened. Record-level debt not only makes financing difficult but could further cascade into a larger crisis. Climate finance, including funding for adaptation and mitigation, likewise falls far below commitments despite the promises made.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda now calls for a stimulus as well as reforms to the international financial architecture (through an increase in finance, exchange of short-term debt for longer term instruments and expansion of contingency financing).

Countries of the region have overcome past crises together. We must continue to bridge our differences, seek ways to reach common ground and determine what could next be possible.

With the 2030 Agenda calling for inclusive and sustainable development, member States, together with all stakeholders, must continue to build the confidence and trust necessary for actions to reach our shared goals. Only then will our progress match our ambitions for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable region.

Excellencies,

As we approach the midpoint for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, I count on your continued leadership and commitment to multilateralism to ensure that the region attains its goal of sustainable development.

I look forward to hearing your views through your deliberations over the course of this session of the Commission.