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**Opening Statement (as prepared for delivery)**

**Agenda item 3: Special Body of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked  
Developing Countries and Pacific Small Island Developing States**

**Tuesday, 16 May 2023  
15:30-17:00 hrs.  
ESCAP Hall, UNCC**

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**Excellency, Ms. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa,**

**Excellency, Mr. Mark Brown, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign  
Affairs of the Cook Islands,**

**Excellencies, distinguished participants and colleagues,**

Good afternoon. It is an honor to stand before you today and welcome you to the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Island Developing States.

I express my gratitude to everyone participating today and hope this session will provide an opportunity for representatives from these three groups of countries as well as other countries and development partners to come together and discuss development challenges that the countries in special situations face and how we can collectively address them through regional cooperation.

This year's theme, "Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Seamless and Sustainable Connectivity," is timely and relevant.

In today's interconnected world, seamless and sustainable connectivity in transport, energy and ICT is central to improving the lives of people. It enables access to markets and technologies and leads to trade and investment.

Greater levels of productivity contribute to higher wages, which in turn contribute to reducing levels of poverty. Connectivity can also accelerate climate actions and build resilience through improved access to innovative solutions.

However, connectivity remains a major challenge for most countries in special situations. Most of them face significant infrastructure deficits due to geographic isolation, rugged terrain, narrow economic bases, lack of economies of scale, and their high vulnerability to external shocks.

They also face significant environmental challenges, including the effects of climate change and loss of biodiversity. These challenges are exacerbated by their limited resources and capacity to respond effectively.

Regional cooperation and partnerships can help countries share resources, knowledge and expertise and hence are critical to addressing these challenges and to creating synergies across the transport, energy and ICT sectors.

ESCAP is committed to supporting the development efforts of our member States, especially those in special situations.

Through our regional cooperation initiatives, we promote the integration of multimodal transport that includes rail, the expansion of electricity grids with enhanced interoperability across countries, and improved digital connectivity

that leads to better access to disaster monitoring and climate adaptation solutions.

We are now at the midway point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The countries in special situations lag especially far behind in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. It is, therefore, an opportune time to focus on fostering solidarity and partnerships to support these countries.

I saw this as just two months ago, the Fifth United Nations Conference on LDCs was held in Qatar, and prior to that conference, the new Doha Programme of Action for LDCs for 2022-2031 was adopted.

In addition, with the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs and the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS coming to an end in 2024, the regional and global processes to assess the progress made for LLDCs and SIDS are beginning, and global UN conferences on LLDCs and SIDS will be held in 2024, as I am sure my dear colleague, the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States, will further elaborate on.

Recognizing this important time, a new resolution is being discussed by the Commission. The resolution recognizes the importance of these global programmes and encourages development partners to provide concrete and substantial support to the efforts made by the region's LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

**Excellencies, distinguished participants and colleagues,**

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of regional cooperation and partnerships in addressing transport, energy and ICT connectivity challenges.

I look forward to hearing your views and ideas on how we can collaborate more closely on strengthening regional cooperation for seamless and sustainable connectivity for the countries in special situations.

Thank you.