

ESCAP Committee on Social Development, Seventh Session

**Statement of
Ms Panudda Boonpala, Deputy Regional Director, ILO Regional
Office for Asia and the Pacific,**

6 September 2022, Bangkok

Madam Executive Secretary of ESCAP,

Ministers, Excellencies,

Dear participants,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Labour Organization, the UN agency that has as its mandate the objective of working towards the achievement of decent work for all and operating through a system of tripartism, meaning negotiating among governments, employers and workers in everything that we do.

As the topic of this discussion – Strategies for building a healthy, protected and productive workforce in Asia and the Pacific – is one that is close to our heart, let me first congratulate ESCAP within our UN family for bringing it to the attention of this important forum, and also for raising the bar of social protection as a necessary tool of social development in agenda item 3.

The session paper sets out very well the challenges that confront us in this region. We are a region where most people do work but where still few people manage to attain what we would qualify as decent jobs. We report year after year that most countries in the Asia-Pacific region have still high rates of informal employment, low coverage of social protection and weak platforms for the functioning of social dialogue. Such gaps mean that employment does not come with the value-added of income security. This in turn limits social advancement and economic prosperity on all levels. This was the situation before the crisis and one that continues since the crisis.

So how do we change things? That is a question that the ILO has been grappling with for the 100 years of our existence as the first of the UN agencies. How do we improve the lives of people, help enterprises to flourish and economies to prosper through decent work and social justice?

Unfortunately there is no one clear pathway to making this happen. But we have gotten closer at understanding what are the building blocks on which a decent work-led inclusive growth transformation can happen. So much of it has to do with making choices to prioritize investment in effective labour market institutions and empowering social partners – workers and employers’ groups – to be a part of the conversation in the formulation and implementation of development strategies. We have good roadmaps in the form of

recent adopted frameworks such as the ILO Global Call to Action for a Human-centred recovery and the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. Let us make use of these instruments and work together within your countries to transform a future of work that fosters social justice and inclusive growth.

Through our continued cooperation, we can get through these turbulent times and foster a healthy, protected and productive workforce and transform the pathways of social development in the Asia-Pacific region.

Thank you.