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**Policy Statement (as prepared for delivery)**  
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**Honourable Chair,**

**Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the seventy-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly,**  
**Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,**

It is my honour and privilege to welcome you today to the 78<sup>th</sup> session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), when we are also observing the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commission.

To celebrate this historic gathering, let us reflect on our achievements and explore pathways to reclaim our future for advancing sustainable development and promoting regional cooperation.

I recognize that member States and all stakeholders have forged enduring partnerships since the beginning of our journey in 1947.

Significant progress in reducing extreme poverty, expanding social welfare and accelerating innovation are testimony to the visionary policymaking and strategic decision-making of the leaders in this region.

But today, our region is at a crossroads. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate risks and conflicts have unveiled the fragility of our interconnected world.

Most recently, heightened geopolitical tensions could further derail the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

We are, indeed, living in a richer but riskier world.

Despite the ongoing crises and uncertainties, we are witnessing new opportunities and hope to move forward together.

## **Excellencies,**

Please allow me to highlight lessons learned from the past few years:

***Building a more inclusive*** region is essential.

Our focus must be to close social protection coverage gaps; raise resources to protect vulnerable groups and hardest-hit micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises; promote employment-led growth; and scale-up human resources and skill development.

***Creating resilient*** social and economic foundations at all levels is key.

To be better prepared for all future crises, emanating from economic and non-economic shocks, governments need to step-up support for climate-disaster-health emergencies; strengthen regional supply chains; bolster resilient trade and investment strategies and transport and transit policies.

**Prioritizing sustainability** must be at the core of all policy initiatives.

If we could embed long-term sustainability in our post-pandemic policy response; incorporate environmental sustainability into business investment decisions; and accelerate green-blue public investment flows, there would be some hope to keep alive the 1.5-degree goal.

**Proposals to reform and transform** must be based on the subregional and country specific contexts.

To address systemic risks, we should understand, foresee and adapt to shocks of the future through strategic foresight.

No one country can move forward on these development agendas alone.

All our resources and energies must be targeted and impactful while promoting rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable principles and approaches.

### **Excellencies,**

As decided by member States, the theme of this year's Commission is “***A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.***”

Please allow me to recognize a few priorities and initiatives:

**First**, Governments must encourage the participation and empowerment of women and girls, youth and persons with disabilities to leave no one behind.

The ***Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*** aims to achieve universal coverage by 2030.

**Second**, the region must accelerate climate action.

The time is now to phase out the use of coal, stop fossil fuel subsidies and make use of carbon pricing.

We are scaling up support for the national ***SDG 7 Road Map and Regional Energy Connectivity*** to ensure the sustainable energy transition in the region.

Robust initiatives towards environmental management and developing a regional cooperation modality on air pollution are central.

Our initiative under the ***Asia-Pacific Issue-Based Coalition on Climate Change Mitigation and Air Pollution*** could provide another opportunity to spur climate action.

**Third**, governments must leverage digital technologies and innovation.

I urge all stakeholders to strengthen work to formulate policies, regulatory frameworks and concrete solutions related to digital connectivity, digital technologies and digital data.

The ***Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative***, for the years 2022–2026, is an important step forward to improve digital cooperation.

**Fourth**, the region needs to embrace climate-smart trade and investment policies and frameworks.

The ***Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific***, a UN treaty developed by the Commission, is well positioned to simplify and digitalize trade procedures.

I call upon more member States to accede to the Framework Agreement.

**Fifth**, let us ensure sustainable financing.

Governments need to prioritize domestic resource mobilization; curb non-developmental expenditures and safeguard SDG investment; raise additional funds through innovative instruments; and work together on debt sustainability.

With the reinvigorated United Nations development system, we are taking concrete steps to strengthen regional policy coordination and partnerships, develop subregional strategies with intergovernmental and multi-sectoral organizations and promote joint country programmes with the UN Resident Coordinator Offices.

These initiatives are a living example of how the Commission sessions can remain a principal platform to meet, synergize and network across the membership and all stakeholders.

The Commission has been the primary avenue to unite voices and promote representation from the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS).

At the same time, we also recognize the diversity of the region.

Emerging countries in the region are increasingly taking leadership roles to steer the development agenda and promote concrete solutions.

### **Excellencies,**

I count on your continued leadership and commitment to multilateralism.

Let me conclude by congratulating the 53 members, nine associate members and all our partners on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ESCAP; thank you for your unwavering support in advancing sustainable development in the region.

I look forward to hearing from your deliberations and guidance.

I wish you a very successful Commission.

Thank you.