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Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

81st session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

(video message)

21 April 2025

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you for the 81st session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

I want to thank the Executive Secretary, Ms. Armida Alisjahbana, for this opportunity and for ESCAP's leadership in advancing sustainable development across the region.

The theme of this session – "Regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific" – is both timely and vital.

Urban development that is just, safe, healthy, inclusive, resilient and sustainable is central to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda.

Cities have throughout history always been hubs of innovation, culture, and commerce. But all of our cities around the world are facing challenges – air pollution, increasing demand for clean water and energy, limited public space, and aging infrastructure, just to name a few.

By 2050, Asia Pacific's urban population is expected to grow by 50 per cent, which means adding 1.2 billion people. So if we do not upgrade infrastructure and enhance public services, many people risk being forced into informal settlements.

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And the region also stands on the frontline of the climate crisis, facing more frequent and intense floods, storms, and heatwaves.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The cost of inaction is high, in fact, too high. We must invest in resilient infrastructure. We have to strengthen disaster risk reduction and integrate climate action and demographic shifts into all of our urban planning.

Local and regional authorities are crucial for developing and implementing sustainable solutions to these urban challenges. In fact, a full 65 per cent – two thirds – o f SDG targets depend on action at the local level.

I am confident that the knowledge and ideas exchanged during this session will lay the foundation for strategic partnerships and policy innovation. I look forward to seeing its outcomes contribute to the 2026 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, where SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities will be under full review.

The Pact for the Future, which we passed last year, has highlighted the commitments required to build a better future for present and for future generations. Let us seize the momentum from this session to transform our cities into real engines of resilience, equity, and opportunity for many, many generations to come.

Thank you so much.