



**Statement by the Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa  
Prime Minister of Samoa**

**Opening session of the Heads of State and Government segment of the  
78<sup>th</sup> Commission session of UNESCAP**

***Theme***

*A Common Agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia Pacific. ESCAP's role in advancing SD in the region and shape the future of regional cooperation.*

Mr President,  
Executive Secretary,  
Heads of State and Government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be invited to be part of the opening session of the ministerial segment of the 78<sup>th</sup> Commission session. It is therefore fitting for me to offer my congratulations and those of my Government to the Commission on the commemoration of this landmark milestone of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At this juncture, we are poised to engage in dialogue to discuss the future of regional cooperation; to advance the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and ensuring the promise of leaving no one behind.

We are all aware that regional cooperation is a critical factor in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its value transcends ease and efficiency of resource mobilisation, spanning diverse and powerful ways through which collective efforts can strengthen the achievement of the SDGs. Cooperative approaches promise to deliver faster results with greater efficiency.

Countries belonging to specific geographic regions are often found to have similar development trajectories, owing to a mix of historical, cultural and locational factors, and hence have many common sustainable development policy challenges. As SIDS in our region, these are the same characteristics we share. Moreover, due to proximity, we are often bound by transboundary issues such as climate change and natural disasters, energy security, transport and ICT connectivity, which need collectively developed and owned policy solutions and transboundary infrastructure networks. Such networks can enhance access to goods and services which are critical for improving living conditions, especially for vulnerable groups.

Mr President,

The Resolution adopted by UNESCAP member states at the 77th Commission Session of 2021 (ESCAP/RES/77/1) gave **recognition to the importance of regional cooperation** in ensuring resilient recovery from the pandemic and calls for, among other areas, enhanced 'cooperation in closing connectivity gaps, strengthening digital connectivity, and promoting the digital economy, sustainable and disaster resilient infrastructure and investment, and to enhance regional supply chain connectivity and diversification'.

We know from experiences around our region that Regional cooperation would not only be desirable, but also feasible if it is placed in the framework of the SDGs

At its heart, the 2030 Agenda calls for fundamental changes in the world's economies, so they produce prosperity for all people, in a way that is inclusive and just, and sustainable over time and across generations. And we need to link the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, all of which are expressed in the 17 SDGs.

The United Nations development system has long operated through entities focused on specific sectors. It must now meet the challenge of providing "integrated" assistance that connects and cuts across the SDGs. In practice, this means effectively and coherently linking diverse partners and sources of expertise, including from governments, parliaments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the full range of international organisations.

The global South is increasingly becoming a source of innovative solutions to developmental challenges and a key SDG accelerator. The Commission is in a position to capture these advantages of the Asia Pacific region and continue to develop networks to link the subregions. The Pacific subregion has a good network of organisations that would contribute to and benefit from region wide exchanges.

Before closing Mr President, I wish to briefly relate the experiences of Samoa in redirecting its development focus to meet our people's vision of "Fostering social harmony, safety, and freedom for all" and to accelerate our sustainable development agenda.

The challenges we face in these unprecedented times have raised our commitment to empower our communities so that they can better cope with such disruptions and threats to our well-being and prosperity. Our decision to prioritise human development over the next 5 years gives recognition to the need to address the critical issues that have marred our socio-economic development over the past 20 years.

Our aspiration is to nurture growth that benefits all of our people. We have widened community participation so that we can build community prosperity, enhance security, and protect our people and the environment. We will build resilience, diversify green development, stimulate innovation and encourage socialisation. Our pursuit of enhanced human development will overcome hardship for the poor and vulnerable people. We will enable them to access opportunities so that they will reach their full potential and enjoy a better quality of life. We greatly encourage our people to share our responsibilities and by working together, we can unlock solutions, accelerate action, and create a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous Samoa.

Mr President,

I look forward to a new and strengthened framework for regional cooperation within and among the subregions and that we have a work programme for 2023 fit for this purpose.

Thank you.