

Agenda Item 5: Review of Regional Progress and Opportunities for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Good afternoon, Excellencies, Fellow Civil Society, and Youth Representatives. I am Ashley Yong, from Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and am honored to speak on behalf of the APFSD Youth Forum, representing more than 400 young people across 36 countries in the region. In the APFSD Youth Forum that was happening on 18 to 20 March 2023, we heard from various UN agencies and youth-led initiatives on the challenges, barriers, and opportunities in achieving the SDGs, and have established a Call To Action document.

As young people from the Southeast Asian region, one of the most vulnerable subregions to the impact of climate change, we are already experiencing severe climate impacts including rising sea levels, heatwaves, flood, and increasingly intense and unpredictable weather events, which has caused huge economic loss and disruption of livelihoods. As a fast-growing subregion, we are worried about the negative impacts that rapid urbanization and development would bring to the people and the environment, despite the benefit and improvement in certain perspectives, as we are still not practicing sustainability as the core of development.

We are confident that young people must be at the heart of the investment and part of the conversation in climate ambition as well as COVID-19 recovery. We need, not only systemic change, mindset and lifestyle transformation toward sustainability, but also meaningful participation and leadership of young people, women and girls in all diversities, regardless of their identities or abilities, throughout the decision-making, planning and implementation processes.

We would like to call upon all governments:

1. To ensure equitable phase-down of fossil fuels, just transition and scale up of low carbon energy carriers now.
2. To invest in low-carbon, affordable and accessible transport infrastructure to support active, shared, and public mobility now.
3. To invest in equitable and sustainable infrastructure that can withstand the climate crisis and natural disasters now.

The clock is ticking.

We, the young people, are ready to creatively, innovatively, and effectively address all the crises we are facing together with the governments, UN agencies, private sectors, academia and other

stakeholders. We urge you to listen and collaborate with young people and partners now. Engage the local community in initiatives such as meeting with the local government on public space improvement.

We must ensure that innovative solutions from young people in response to the SDGs and COVID-19 recovery are amplified at national, regional, and subregional levels coherently; and the older generation need to ensure these solutions are heard.

Through the intergenerational approach, our effort to achieve the Agenda 2030 would be fast-tracked and impactful.

The time to act is now, the time to work together to change the system and shift the power is now. Thank you!