

76<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCAP, 21 May 2020

Intervention under Agenda 4 –

**Regional cooperation to address the socio-economic effects of the global health crisis**

Mr Chair,

Sri Lanka congratulates on your election to steer the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission and at the outset express our fullest support in your endeavours, as the Session proceeds on a virtual Platform.

Sri Lanka is pleased to have cosponsored the Resolution on **Regional cooperation, to address the socio-economic effects of the global health crisis.**

During this unprecedented health crisis, millions around the world have lost their lives, while several more millions have been affected. As one of the most populous regions, the magnitude of health impact to Asia Pacific Region remains alarming. The socio-economic impacts in most of the developing countries and those with special needs in the region are bound to be even more gloomy. As we aim to accelerate progress in achieving the SDG through the Decade of Action, each Government, as well as the region will need to 'think new', to find ways to build better resilience in our societies, stronger policy responses, and novel approaches to bridge the disparities among societies and countries, to face any future pandemics.

In this context, Sri Lanka was pleased to join the 'SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund', with a financial contribution of 5 Million USD, for the purpose of tackling and mitigating the risks associated with the coronavirus pandemic in the South Asian region. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre launched a website for information related to the pandemic in member countries. A common electronic platform has been envisaged to share information, knowledge and expertise of health services.

In Sri Lanka's national capacity, the Government took robust and effective measures to prevent the spread of Covid – 19 at an early stage. The preventive efforts and the management of the crisis have been applauded by the WHO. The strong health system coupled with the logistical support from the security and police forces at the frontline helped respond to the pandemic situation more effectively. The state sponsored quarantine process was well streamlined to curtail the spread of the virus within communities.

We support the request to the ESCAP to make an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 to the member States in the Region, and in that regard, we wish to make following recommendations for a stronger regional cooperation to ensure a collective response;

- a) To develop a strong platform within the Commission, for the States to share experiences and best practices, with a view to help states prepare better for any similar situations in future.

- b) In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, Sri Lanka was able to benefit from the continued investments done by the successive Governments, in developing a strong national health service, implementing the UHC. We urge strong regional and global collaboration on enhancing capacity building in public health systems, exchange of technical cooperation and access to medical supplies, including vaccines, at affordable prices.
- c) Countries that have made progress in achieving SDGs, will now need to redouble efforts to keep the momentum in their economic activities. Challenges in addressing production disruptions, loss of employments particularly due to the plummet in demand for non-essential goods and services has forced enterprises around the world to suspend or scale down operations. Cooperation among countries on trade, migration would be essential.
- d) ESCAP may also consider the post Covid-19 issues when formulating and implementing macroeconomic policies and negotiating regional cooperative mechanisms and agreements in trade and investment, including the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement.
- e) The pandemic has exposed the need for sound digital infrastructure to effectively respond during a crisis of this nature, particularly in commerce, governance as well as disseminating information. ESCAP members could look in to increased cooperation on e-consumer technology and to reduce technological barriers, particularly for small scale vendors.

Thank you Mr. Chair