Thank you Mr Chair,
Madam ES
Distinguished delegates,
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I am honored to share, through the country statement of the Philippines, our country’s contributions at reducing inequality.

We have previously shared that we have mainstreamed the Agenda 2030 into our development plan. SDG 10 on reducing inequality, is at the heart of our current Philippine Development Plan [PDP].

The PDP 2017-2022 is the first of four medium term development plans that is geared towards our long-term vision to be a prosperous nation where no one is poor, where our peoples live long and healthy lives, are smart and innovative and live in a high trust society. At the outset, we acknowledged that to achieve this long-term vision, we need to immediately address inequality. First, because it is the right thing to do; second, because prosperity can only be achieved and
sustained when a lot more participating in the growth process; and third, because prosperity also requires a political constituency. And for us, what needs to be addressed is inequality of outcomes and opportunities.

The current PDP espouses the National Spatial Strategy that is based on the study of economic and demographic trends going back many years and projected into the future. It prescribes three principles for selecting development strategies: (1) agglomeration efficiency of metropolitan centers, (2) connectivity between centers and settlements, and (3) reduction of vulnerability. Our infrastructure program subscribes to the NSS, whereby we have identified four metropolitan centers and several other regional and subregional centers.

To address the inequality in the quantity and quality of infrastructure within settlements, especially outside the Centers, we launched the program called “Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities,” (ADM). In the Philippines, the delivery of a number of public services has been devolved to the local government units (LGU), to be funded out of their revenue allotments and other sources. For many LGUs, however, the funds are not enough to cover the infrastructure gap. The ADM provides supplementary funds coming from Central government to be used for projects such as water system, evacuation facility, local access roads, water impounding, and sanitation and health facilities. In order to access the funds, LGUs will need to demonstrate adherence to good governance practices.
The second pillar of the PDP is all about effecting inequality-reducing transformation. For production sectors, it is about expanding market opportunities and then increasing the access of the small farmers and fisherfolk, and micro-, small- and medium enterprises. For individuals, it is about increasing their ability to participate in the growth process and reducing their vulnerabilities. Expanding market opportunities necessarily involves promoting trade in both goods and services. Hence, the Philippines actively participates in multilateral and regional fora to foster greater cooperation, to wit, WTO, ASEAN, APEC, UN processes, and other bilateral agreements. Currently, the Philippines is considering participating in a project to develop the work program on MSME development for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP). The work program's objectives include identifying ways for APEC to further assist MSMEs in utilizing free trade agreements and providing opportunities for capacity building.

We are also committed to the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS). We have been working closely with our ASEAN neighbors in developing the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework, which is a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across participating ASEAN countries. This intends to optimize opportunities for our professionals who consider working abroad as their path towards achieving human development for themselves and their family. And also for this reason and to
include all migrants, we have been actively participating the negotiations towards the Global Compact on Migration.

We also tap development partners in building our resilience to natural calamities. In addition to projects designed to mitigate the impact of natural hazards, most of which are funded domestically, we have availed of disaster risk resilience financing. The latter is to ensure that we do not suffer undue fiscal stress when we undertake rehabilitation and reconstruction in the aftermath of natural calamities.

We are investing heavily in human capital. In addition to free primary and secondary education, we have undertaken massive reforms to improve the quality of education. And beginning last school year, we provide free tertiary education in our state universities and colleges. We have also increased the budget for student assistance for those enrolled in private universities and colleges.

At the same time, we are aware that certain groups require special assistance, like infants, children, women, indigenous peoples and differently-abled persons. We are particularly concerned about the children in poor families. And for them, we have been implementing and recently enhanced, the conditional cash transfer program. This program provides cash transfers to identified beneficiaries on the condition that family members who are of school age attend school, and children and pregnant and lactating mothers seek health care.
To fund all these and for other purposes, we have recently reformed our tax policies to make it fair, equitable and the tax administration simpler. Our reforms in sin taxes have been providing ample resources to fund our health programs at the same time that it has reduced consumption of these "harmful" goods. Recently, we have expanded the coverage to sugar sweetened beverages in the hope of curbing the incidence of diabetes in the country.

While undertaking reforms, we are mindful that there could be unintended consequences on the poor and disadvantaged sectors. With the tax reform, we expect a temporary increase in inflation. For this reason, we have also put in place an Unconditional Cash Transfer program, for a limited time of three years, for the bottom 50% of families to cover their temporary loss in purchasing power resulting from the tax reform. Simultaneously, we are working to institute robust solutions to our logistics problem, including strategic trade policy.

As you can see, the Philippines is one with the UN member countries who put great emphasis on reducing inequality. Indeed, we know that SDG 10: Reducing inequality is at the core of the Goals as it operationalizes the principle of "leaving no one behind." More importantly to us, it is the key to attaining our long term vision.

We thank the UNESCAP for making reducing inequality the focus of this year's Commission session. As UNESCAP member states, the challenge for us is to look outside of our silos and beyond our borders to craft solutions to address the interconnected nature of inequality. And I would like to acknowledge the crucial
role of Madam ES in promoting this consciousness. At the same time, ESCAP through Madam ES has made us aware of the issues of climate change, inclusive finance, and others especially as they affect the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. Indeed, the UNESCAP and its member states, like the SDGs, are interconnected and the solutions that we craft must be fully aware of this interconnectedness.

Thank you.