

Excellency Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Vice President of Economic and Social Council,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of our sister Regional Commissions of the United Nations, I am pleased to share highlights from the regions to set the scene for the discussion today at this timely HLPF plenary.

While the number of COVID-19 cases has been relatively limited in some of these countries, the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic are significant. This is in part a result of the high levels of external dependency and exposure that many

of these countries face, and their limited capacity to cope with shocks.

These countries have experienced considerable reductions in economic growth. They have seen widespread unemployment, sharp contractions in international trade, and a significant slowdown in the flow of external resources.

The pandemic has increased rates of poverty and exacerbated existing inequalities. In Asia-Pacific LDCs an estimated 12 million people have fallen below the \$3.20 poverty line by 2021. In Africa, up to 40 million people have been pushed below the \$1.90 poverty line.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

African countries, LDCs and LLDCs already were lagging in making progress towards realizing the SDGs. The pandemic has dimmed even further the possibility of achieving them by 2030.

Urgent policy actions are therefore needed so that these countries can build back better and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

In this regard, allow me to highlight three areas to focus in addressing such challenges:

First, recovery programmes must be scaled up and put people and planet first to ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery. This can be done for instance through increasing investments to strengthen social protection and health-care systems.

Also, the size of support packages must be expanded and more coverage for informal sector workers is needed.

Importantly, policy responses must promote a sustainable development agenda, rather than support environmentally harmful activities, as has too often been the case.

We must also acknowledge that economic growth alone is not sufficient to ensure sustainable development.

Economic models that incorporate the protection of natural resources, the promotion of renewable energy, the development of green and resilient infrastructure will form the basis for building forward towards the SDGs.

Second, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of boosting export diversification, moving up international value chains, and harnessing new and emerging technologies.

LLDCs have suffered particularly from the disruption of supply chains and the introduction of non-tariff measures brought by the pandemic. Therefore, policy actions should be directed towards enhancing connectivity, promoting border crossing facilitation, and boosting transport infrastructure expenditure.

The new Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific can be a promising initiative in this regard. Similarly, the Centre of Excellence on Digital ID, Digital Trade and Digital Economy that the Economic Commission for Africa is working with the African Union Commission will support exploiting the benefits of digitalization for Africa's development.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of the international community in complementing national efforts to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The international community should make use of modalities such as the issuance of new special drawing rights, voluntary development cooperation funding, market mechanisms, and debt swaps for sustainable development and international carbon-trading schemes to further support these countries.

I welcome the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative for the poorest countries as well as increased assistance in accessing COVID-19 vaccines to reduce additional pressure on governments' fiscal space.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The regional commissions of the United Nations, are committed to engage with regional and subregional organization, multilateral development banks and financial institutions.

We all must work together in raising our ambitions for realizing the SDGs, particularly for those that are currently not on track, as we are left with only less than nine years until 2030.

Thank you for your attention.