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Under-Secretary-General of United Nations and Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Panelist (as prepared for delivery)

HLPF 2021 Side Event

SDGs in focus:

How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal and inclusive societies (SDGs 3, 10,16, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)

8 July 2021

7:30

9:00-12.15 am (New York) | 6.00-9.15 am Berkley | /20.00-23.15 pm (Bangkok)

Virtual: Zoom

ES Slot: 3 minutes

Question from the panel: Given your experience, how do you think countries can make effective and enduring changes towards more equitable and inclusive societies across multiple dimensions? What are some of the key actions that need to be taken in both the short-term and long-term?

Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the underlying inequalities and gaps in access to social protection. Similarly, the latest health challenges arising from COVID-19 and its overwhelming negative economic impact have been magnified by inequality and institutional challenges.

Social protection and universal health coverage play critical roles in shielding people's well-being but also to achieve many of the SDGs. Responses to the pandemic have shown that countries with well-funded and comprehensive health

care and social protection systems were able to deal more effectively with the pandemic, and limit its health and socio-economic impacts.

Acknowledging this, our annual Commission session in April endorsed the “Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific.” The Action Plan has some 15 national actions to be implemented by 2030, including setting national targets for social protection and sharing national experiences in progress reports. ESCAP, ILO and other UN entities will collaborate to support its implementation.

The Commission also adopted a resolution requesting ESCAP to work with all other relevant UN entities and WHO to ensure universal access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. We plan to do this by developing and utilizing regional cooperation mechanisms and frameworks for this purpose.

Our sister Commission in Africa, ECA, has proposed leveraging the AfCFTA, a market of 1.3 billion worth \$3.2 trillion GDP, to optimize interlinkages across SDGs. For example, in the health domain, the creation of a unique market for pooled procurement, localized production and quality control was instrumental in sourcing required supplies, expanding fiscal space, and promoting production of medicines for responding to the pandemic. This demonstrates how working in such partnerships can address some of the development challenges Africa is facing.

The lack of universal access to more encompassing and well-funded social protection schemes has been confirmed as a structural hazard in Latin America and the Caribbean, not only in the face of epidemic/health shocks, but also when confronted with economic and natural disasters shocks. This requires forging a

new social contract specifically to devote the resources required to attain universal social protection.

In Western Asia, ESCWA is providing up-to-date data to help address inequality and the shrinking of the middle class and advocating for social solidarity and transforming modes of governance.

Many middle-income countries in the European region had limited fiscal space to address the pandemic and have been saddled with a legacy of increased public debt. The pandemic has questioned existing growth models, including reliance on tourism for economic diversification.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated inequalities not only within but also across countries. Regional cooperation is necessary to avoid the emergence of a K-shaped recovery with new divides, and exploit opportunities to enhance economic dynamism.