

President U Thein Sein's Speech at 69th Session of UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific

Mr Deputy Secretary General, Madame Under Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I join you here today. It is a particular pleasure to be here at the invitation of Under Secretary-General Dr Noeleen Heyzer, who has been a steadfast friend of Myanmar since the beginning of her tenure as the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and who has led this Regional Commission to new relevance and new heights. I have long been an admirer of her courage and determination. I am humble and thankful for UNESCAP's decision to present plaque of recognition for the vision, leadership and courage in setting Myanmar on the path to change. I am confident that this kind of recognition comes from no my efforts alone, but from collective efforts of Myanmar People.

I am pleased as well to be part of this Regional Policy Development Forum. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, from its inception, was designed to bring the region together to face common challenges and to address common needs and has been a critical part of the region's multilateral architecture. I am proud that my compatriot U Nyun led this august body for many of its early years and I would like now to reaffirm Myanmar's steadfast commitment to ESCAP and the work it is undertaking.

Our government has been concurrently carrying out in momentum of the two major missions: political stability and economic development. We have been implementing relaxations and necessary policy changes in line with the newly endorsed Framework for Economic and Social Reforms while we are building strong economic institutions for economic development. In order to take actions of the opportunities that rise from current political and economic changes, we have started all transparent and inclusive stakeholders meetings including civil societies. It is important to strengthen public private partnership as well as to reinforce mutual trust between them. We greatly appreciate UNESCAP's aids in public private partnership policy implementations.

Since our economy is mostly relied on agriculture, tremendous changes in rural and agricultural sectors are demanding at the moment. Therefore, we plan to accelerate public private partnership in agricultural sector as well. We greatly appreciate UNESCAP's contributions and cooperation in this area.

We meet in special times. On the one hand Asia and Pacific's economic development and success in reducing poverty has been one of the key narratives of the early 21st century world. We marvel at the development of the past decades, the of consumer societies around the region, the massive improvements in infrastructure, and emergence of new middle classes.

On the hand we know that the continuation of this positive story is not something on which we can depend. The global economy has been in difficult times for several years and worsening times in many the bigger economies is a real possibility. Demand for Asian goods may decline.

Further economic shocks are possible. The only certainty is that uncertainties will continue, at least over the medium term.

As growth slows we know as well that it is the poorer countries and more vulnerable people and communities that will suffer most in any downturn.

And even with continued growth, we also are aware of the dangers of unregulated development, on the natural environment, on social cohesion, and the daily lives of ordinary people.

We are aware too that we live in a region that is more at risk from the impact of natural disasters than any other in the world. And here again it is the poor and most vulnerable that will suffer the most if we ignore the challenges that face us and are unprepared.

The theme of this year's forum - Building Resilience to Natural Disasters and Economic Crises is an incredibly apt one.

Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the region. My government is working hard to change this, to grow the economy in a balanced way, to protect the environment at the same time, to pay special attention to vulnerable communities, to end the armed conflicts that have plagued us for so many decades with a just and sustainable peace, to end our isolation, see the lifting of sanctions, and rejoin the global economy.

But as we set our boat out into these broader waters, we are all too aware of that we make ourselves more vulnerable to the shocks and crises emanating from world markets. This is not a new experience for us. In the 19th century, under colonialism, Myanmar was brought into the global economy. For a while this created growth and new jobs, new opportunities. But we were entirely unprepared for the Great Depression and the sudden collapse of prices in Myanmar's exports. Millions lost everything. Extremist ideologies followed.

We are also too aware of dangers of natural disasters. Cyclone Nargis led to the deaths of more than 100,000 people, mainly in my own home region of the Irrawaddy delta. Dr Heyzer and her team were at the forefront of helping us in the aftermath of that terrible tragedy. And if there is one thing we know for sure, it is that natural disasters will strike again in Myanmar.

We have read and followed with great interest the reports that have been written and the discussions that have taken place over the past few days on this theme. I understand the importance of not just national but also community level resilience. We want to learn but also share our own experiences and be part of new regional partnerships to tackle our common threats and challenges.

I wish you all the best in the deliberations to follow.

Thank you.