

**Ver: Final**

**Opening Address & Policy Statement as Delivered by  
Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
and ESCAP Executive Secretary.**

**Ministerial Segment  
69th Session of the Commission  
Bangkok, Thailand, on 29 April 2013**

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Your Excellency, U Thein Sein,  
President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Your Excellency, Mr. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão,  
Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Your Excellency, Mr. Gordon Darcy Lilo,  
Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands

Your Excellency, Mr. Plodprasop Suraswadi,  
Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand

Your Excellency, Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith,  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR and Chair of the Group of  
Landlocked Developing Countries

Your Excellency Mr. Sarath Amunugama,  
Senior Minister for International Monetary Cooperation and Acting Chair of the 68<sup>th</sup> session  
of the Commission

Mr. Jan Eliasson,  
Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

Honorable Ministers,

United Nations Under-Secretaries-General &  
Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Regional Commissions

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **Introduction**

In my first speech to the 2008 Commission session, as Executive Secretary, I said that ESCAP is only as strong and effective as our member States decide that it should be.

Standing here today, five years later, I am proud to see that we have never been stronger. Today we are honored, for the first time in the history of the Commission, by the participation of more than 40 very senior leaders from our region - heads of State and Government, Vice-Presidents, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers, Deputy Ministers and former Ministers, as

well as by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and my fellow Under-Secretaries-General and Executive Secretaries of the other UN Regional Commissions.

It is my great joy to welcome so many leaders, senior policy-makers, opinion-shapers, and friends to Bangkok, to ESCAP, and to this landmark 69<sup>th</sup> session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

My very special welcome and thanks goes to H.E. U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Mr. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and H.E. Mr. Gordon Darcy Lilo, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, for being with us today as we discuss Asia-Pacific's next historic transformation.

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates,*

### **Achievements of 'Rising Asia'**

Rising Asia-Pacific was once a very different place. Poverty and violence devastated large parts of our region and the world was pessimistic about our prospects.

In 1968, the Swedish economist and Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal, published his book, *The Asian Drama*, which predicted a future for Asia of poverty and deprivation, but which concluded that "The drama is still unfolding...history is within the power of man [and woman] to shape".

How right he was. The region has transformed itself in pursuit of rapid economic growth and social development, which has affected more than 60 per cent of the world's population, and has made a real difference to people's lives.

Just four decades later, despite the global financial crisis, Asia stands firm as the engine not only of regional, but indeed global economic recovery; has created an expanding middle class; and has succeeded in eliminating half of the world's absolute poverty. The Asian development drama has turned potential tragedy into inspirational progress, because our leaders decided to "meet together, hold together and to advance together"<sup>1</sup>.

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates,*

### **Challenges of the Next Great Transition**

Asia-Pacific's continued rise is, however, by no means preordained. The path ahead is not without difficulties, and doing more of the same will not advance our shared development journey to the future we want. Success will require a different pattern of growth, cooperation, and partnership, to address the multiple risks and challenges that we currently face:

- Increasing inequality within and between countries, which could undermine social cohesion and stability;
- Intense competition for natural resources;
- Climate change, which affects weather patterns, threatening agricultural production, our oceans, and our communities;
- Weak governance and institutions, as well as daunting poverty; and
- Lack of human security as a result of criminal, communal, ethnic, religious, and gender-based violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru at the 1<sup>st</sup> Asian Relations Conference in 1947

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### **The Next Transformation**

The next Act of the Asia-Pacific drama cannot follow the same script. It has to prepare for another great transformation to sustain its dynamism. Our region is rethinking and reinvesting in itself, by addressing these serious interlinked challenges and seizing emerging opportunities and synergies - turning stumbling blocks, where possible, into new building blocks.

We are looking for new drivers of growth, struggling to close infrastructure and development gaps, address jobless growth and unemployment (especially amongst our youth), and build stronger, more accountable institutions. We are also striving to make our cities safer and more sustainable, and to rebalance our economies towards better quality inclusive growth, without forgetting our oceans, our agriculture, and our rural areas.

The countries of Asia and the Pacific are seeking to improve energy and water efficiency, as well as natural resource governance. They are also spending more on health, education, and social protection – to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

This is no longer the same development journey. We are taking another leap.

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates,*

This transformational change towards inclusive and sustainable development will not prove easy. Great transitions demand even greater collective leadership. That is why we are here today, as leaders of Asia and the Pacific, to discuss, to decide, and to assume a more active role in the stewardship of our region, our people, and our planet.

Our success depends on enlightened policy choices, deeper regional cooperation, global partnerships, strong institutions, democratic governance, and the rule of law, to address existing challenges and shared vulnerabilities. In this next phase, we need to maximize opportunities to shape a more resilient Asia-Pacific, rooted in shared prosperity, social equity and sustainability, empowered by the creativity of our people, and valuing the gifts of the Earth.

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates,*

### **ESCAP Translating Regional Decisions into Action**

ESCAP is already assisting our member States to advance this critical agenda, by providing research and analysis, policy options, technical assistance and innovative solutions to improve the lives of our people.

This is why inclusive and sustainable development has driven our annual Commission session and its resolutions since 2008 – from energy and sustainable agriculture, to financing for an inclusive and green future; from gender equality, social protection, disability and aging, to regional economic integration, enhancing statistical capacity and this year – building resilience to multiple shocks, and supporting the development needs of the Pacific islands, least developed, and landlocked developing states.

In our consultations on the post-2015 development agenda it has become clear that our region is seeking a new social contract between states and their people, and between states and the market.

This social contract has to promote people's engagement, translating growth into productive employment for all. It has to adopt policies for the fairer distribution of wealth, economic assets, and opportunities – where there is better resource management and better financial governance, including at the global level, greater accountability of both the public and private sectors, and providing human security and quality services so that all people can live in dignity and freedom from want, from fear, and from discrimination.

The 69th Commission session will discuss many of these critical issues in our different panels over the next three days, to hear your views, experiences, and recommendations. Success in these areas calls for a new model of development, to be based on structural changes for equality, inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainable development, as a more integrated whole, as we shape the post-2015 development agenda.

The means of implementation should address how to mobilize and harness partnerships for global public goods, including: fair trade and a stable international financial system, that serves the needs of the real economy.

It is time to reset our thinking, create new policy frameworks and institutions, as well as global partnerships to build the future we want...together

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates,*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I want to thank you for your unwavering support for ESCAP, and for helping the Commission to live up to the potential first identified by regional leaders more than six decades ago.

Your appreciation for and advocacy on behalf of ESCAP, both within the region and in global forums, is what ensures that even in this time of deepening austerity, the Commission has never been stronger, more relevant, or more important to the people of Asia and the Pacific.

We are here as the community of the United Nations – nations united in common purpose, committed to the values of the UN. We must continue to be guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter, and by our shared responsibility to the people of our region, to our common humanity, and to generations still to come.

I thank you.