

**Statement by His Excellency Sohail Mahmood, Ambassador of Pakistan and
Permanent Representative to UNESCAP, during the Policy Debate, at the 69th
Session of UNESCAP Commission, Bangkok, 29 April-1 May 2013**

**Mr. Chairman,
Madame Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen!**

While framing the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the founding fathers underlined their determination, among other things, *“to employ the international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”*

Today, almost 70 years later, promoting inclusive and sustainable development of *all peoples* remains a need more critical than ever before. And there is no instrument more indispensable for the fulfillment of this need than the United Nations.

It is essentially an affirmation of this belief that we have witnessed such high-level participation of leaders from across the region in this 69th Commission Session.

Indeed, it reflects a ringing endorsement of the development path being promoted by ESCAP in a productive partnership with its wide and diverse membership.

This is no small feat, and my delegation extends sincere felicitations to Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer – whose dynamic leadership and tireless efforts have ensured institutional transformation of ESCAP and turned it into an action- and result-oriented organization with visible impact.

Mr. Chairman,

This is the first Commission session since the Rio+20 Summit adopted the vision on “The Future We Want.” Also, as we move closer to the finishing line for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), discussions are picking up momentum on the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

At this crucial juncture, our choices are obvious: One, to re-double our efforts to achieve as much progress on MDGs as possible in the remaining less than 1,000 days. Two, we must make a substantial contribution from Asia-Pacific in carving out the sustainable development goals, along with the means of implementation.

Within this perspective, my delegation welcomes the *Economic and Social Survey 2013* and Theme Study on *Building resilience against natural disasters and major*

economic crises. The extensive research undertaken by the Secretariat in producing these fine publications, containing innovative ideas, is appreciated.

Mr. Chairman,

The theme study reconfirms that Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region, with the loss of life in natural disasters during the past decade estimated to be 800,000.

Due to geo-physical conditions, climatic extremes, and high degrees of exposure and vulnerability, Pakistan is a disaster-prone country. A range of hydrometeorological, geo-physical and biological hazards pose risks to Pakistan.

In the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, we lost over 75,000 lives. In 2010, we had floods of 'Biblical proportions' – which affected 20 million people and washed away years of development gains in a matter of weeks. Years 2011 and 2012 also saw recurring floods.

Learning from its own experience in 2005, Pakistan has made a shift from the erstwhile response-focused to the current, more proactive, approach. Elaborate legislative and institutional frameworks have been instituted at the national, provincial and district levels to ensure disaster risk reduction and enhance capacity for disaster preparedness and management. Risk reduction is being integrated into development planning.

NDMA, the lead focal agency, has adopted a comprehensive policy – covering DRR in a more holistic way and introducing a proactive and anticipatory approach by laying special emphasis on risk assessment, prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

The policy shall promote priority measures to ameliorate already existing vulnerability to hazards, and ensure that future development initiatives add resilience. The policy also seeks to provide guidelines for timely, dedicated and adequate investment on DRR at all levels which will not only substantially reduce the hazard risks but also the consequential damages and economic costs associated with response, recovery and rehabilitation.

The real focus of current efforts is on mobilizing resources and putting in place strong mechanisms for implementation.

In the Secretariat's theme study, the proposed concept of "mutual support through regional cooperation" – with its three pillars, three enablers, and an integrator – makes a significant contribution to this policy dialogue.

There are myriad ways in which countries in the region are already cooperating and it would be beneficial to consolidate this work and make the impact more meaningful, utilizing the platform of ESCAP.

Pakistan stands ready to share its experience, and also learn from others, as we pool our ideas, resources and efforts to build the region's resilience to withstand, adapt to, and

recover from overlapping shocks. We must also collectively exert to ensure that disaster risk reduction is duly incorporated in the post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan agrees with the analysis presented in the *Survey 2013* and its core emphasis on the need for balancing the stabilization and development role of macroeconomic policies.

Some of the realities highlighted in the Survey are sobering, particularly those in our sub-region of South and Southwest Asia. For instance, the sub-region remains home to the world's largest concentration of people living in extreme poverty and hunger, and people without access to basic sanitation and electricity.

The sub-region has also witnessed stalled progress on health, nutrition and sanitation-related MDGs and other targets.

Furthermore, inclusive development is held back by unequal living standards, unequal human development outcomes, and unequal opportunities based on gender, education and labour market status.

At the same time, the challenges of economic slowdown, widening budget and current account deficits, higher inflation rates, persisting power shortages, and increasing youth unemployment pervade our sub-region.

In Pakistan, the economic landscape registered improvement during 2012 – as reflected in a higher GDP growth rate of 3.7%, lowering inflation, improved performance of manufacturing and agriculture sectors, growing remittances, and enhanced spending on pro-poor social protection programmes.

Effort to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio also continued. Meanwhile, far-reaching progress has been achieved in promoting regional cooperation– both to address energy deficits through projects with partners in Central Asia and Southwest Asia and to enhance trade liberalization with countries in the SAARC region.

Nevertheless, energy shortages, budget deficit, balance-of-payment pressures, and external shocks including recurring natural disasters have contributed to lower productivity levels and slow overall growth.

The *Survey's* fundamental message to everyone is that there is no room for complacency. We agree that the sub-region's economic, social and environmental priorities must be balanced in favour of eradicating poverty and hunger. There should also be concerted efforts for minimizing inequalities, addressing energy deficits, enhancing regional connectivity, and turning the youth bulge into a demographic dividend.

We suggest that the ESCAP illustrative study on the public investment needs to deliver the proposed package of policies to promote inclusive and sustainable development be widened to estimate the requirement for countries like Pakistan as well. It would also be useful if ESCAP could carry out analytical work on how to mobilize financial resources for this purpose, especially through raising tax-to-GDP ratios.

We would further like ESCAP to undertake a study on the role of regional cooperation for enhanced energy security in South and Southwest Asia and to also build on its preliminary analysis of the requisite policy mix to reap the demographic dividend in the sub-region.

Mr. Chairman,

At this 69th Session, we will be taking decisions on the Commission's Conference structure, following the review mandated by the Commission. Pakistan appreciates the study done by the external Evaluation Team led by Dr. Hafiz Pasha and its bold and far-reaching recommendations.

We have endorsed the proposed incremental approach and the roadmap suggested in the Executive Secretary's report. The changes to be effected this year would place us firmly on the path of enhancing the Commission's efficacy and in turn ESCAP's effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan is currently preparing to go to parliamentary polls. This is a historic moment in our democratic development. The government has completed its 5-year term and we are now poised for a transfer of power to the new elected government after the 11 May elections. This process has been aided by a strong parliament, independent judiciary, vibrant media, active civil society, and increasingly informed and involved citizenry.

In the external realm, Pakistan continues to make its rightful contribution to regional and international peace, stability and prosperity – with a particular focus on the immediate neighborhood.

As a country with abiding commitment to multilateralism, Pakistan will continue to lend its unstinting support and cooperation to ESCAP in all its endeavours to build an inclusive, resilient and sustainable future for Asia and the Pacific, where *all peoples* grow together and share collective prosperity.

I thank you.

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