

**Seismic mitigation retrofit and life-cycle replacements project
at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific premises
in Bangkok**

FIFTH COMMITTEE

Statement by

**Mr. Chandramouli Ramanathan, Assistant Secretary-General, Controller,
13 November 2020**

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished Delegates,

I am pleased to introduce the Secretary-General's progress report on the seismic mitigation and life cycle replacement project at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (A/75/235). The report is being submitted pursuant to section XII of General Assembly Resolution 74/263 E, in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit a progress report for the seismic mitigation retrofit and life-cycle replacements project approved in December 2016 through General Assembly Resolution 71/272 A.

At the onset, allow me to underscore the importance of this project. Bangkok is the regional hub of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, with 26 entities calling our premises their home. ESCAP, with 53 member States and 9 associate members, annually hosts over 3,000 meetings and conferences with over 55,000 participants through its Conference Centre.

In line with its title, this project is about seismic code compliance and life-cycle replacement. Seismically active zones surround Bangkok. Earthquake tremors have been felt at the premises, which is not fully compliant with the

current seismic code that came into effect after the Secretariat building was completed in 1975. The building's key mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems are either reaching or have reached its useful life. The Organisation must ensure that the building remains compliant with fire as well as life safety codes. Given events in other duty stations, we are mindful that the health and safety of occupants within our premises cannot be compromised.

As reflected in the report, the procurement of the contract for construction presented an unexpected challenge. The tendering of contracts for general construction produced only one viable bid, which was significantly above the approved construction budget. To ensure that the project is delivered within the budget approved by the General Assembly, bidding was cancelled and re-tendering initiated. In the meantime, ESCAP have reviewed the bidding process to reconfirm the validity of the bid documents, made adjustments to ensure better alignment with local market conditions and conducted further outreach to encourage greater participation.

ESCAP continues to strengthen its occupational health and safety standards. Through partnership with the International Labor Organization, ESCAP have adopted some of their best practices in occupational safety and health. ESCAP have also worked with the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOSH) at Headquarters to ensure compliance with Organizational standards. As a result, the swift introduction of safety as well as preventative and control measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to renewed confidence in ESCAP's ability to manage the premises.

To ensure good governance, the project's Stakeholder Committee, which meets quarterly, has been broadened from selected key clients to all on-site

United Nations entities. This has allowed ESCAP to ensure greater consensus and support from all our clients. ESCAP also maintain regular dialogue with staff representatives, not only of ESCAP but also from other entities within the premises, to ensure that all staff concerns are heard and addressed. Additional support for the project is provided by the Global Asset Management and Policy Service to ensure effective oversight and supervision of the project. This collaboration will become even more critical during the construction phase starting next year.

I would finally like to express my appreciation for the support received from the host country, especially in terms of knowledge shared on local construction methods, building codes and regulations, and occupational health and safety standards for construction in Bangkok.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

It is requested that the General Assembly take note of the report and appropriate an amount of \$6,321,600 for project activities in 2021.

I thank you.