



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS BY MR BENEDICT TAN, DELEGATE OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA 141: SEISMIC MITIGATION RETROFIT AND LIFE-CYCLE REPLACEMENTS PROJECT AT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC PREMISES IN BANGKOK, AT THE MAIN PART OF THE 75TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, 13 NOVEMBER 2020

Thank you, Mr Chair.

1 I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Agenda Item 141: Programme Budget for 2021 in relation to the seismic mitigation retrofit and life-cycle replacements project at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) premises in Bangkok. ASEAN aligns itself with the statement delivered by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

2 ASEAN thanks Mr Chandramouli Ramanathan, Controller and Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning, Finance and Budget for introducing the report of the Secretary-General on this matter. We also thank Mr Abdallah Bachar Bong, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for the Committee's related report.

Mr Chair,

3 It is critical that we provide all United Nations Regional Commissions with safe, suitable and accessible workplaces. ESCAP serves one of the largest bases of clients – with 53 Member States and nine Associate Members. We remain grateful for the continued efforts of the Government of

Thailand, as the host country, in facilitating the work of ESCAP, including by facilitating discussions with the relevant local and regional authorities and stakeholders, as well as assisting the project team in engaging with key local technical experts.

4 As we strive to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ESCAP has been pivotal in providing technical assistance and capacity-building related to economic and social development to countries in the Asia Pacific region. However, much work remains to be done. To this end, ASEAN reaffirms our support for ESCAP and the leadership of its Executive Secretary Armida Alisjahbana.

Mr Chair,

5 ASEAN stresses the importance of good governance, effective oversight, transparency and accountability in the management of the project to ensure its timely completion within budget. In this regard, we look forward to the timely resumption of the annual audit by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions, whenever the conditions permit. We continue to encourage the project team to explore new and innovative ways to optimise the use of space, conserve energy, derive cost savings, and reduce business disruption, with due consideration given to the most cost-effective approach.

6 ASEAN commends ESCAP's efforts in implementing its environmental management strategies. We are pleased to note that considerable energy savings would be achieved through several passive and active construction measures and design features of the building. We also recognise that ESCAP remains committed to reducing its carbon footprint by establishing a system to promote staff awareness and conservation in areas such as energy, water, meetings and travel.

7 ASEAN reiterates that, in implementing this project, special attention should be paid to the incorporation and use of local knowledge, material, technology, and in-house capacity. To this end, we welcome efforts by ESCAP to engage and collaborate with the Host Country and other Secretariat entities throughout the planning and implementation of the project. These efforts include inter alia the planning of a business seminar to attract potential local vendors for the project, and knowledge sharing with the Council of Engineers of Thailand on

the local construction market and the lessons learnt from the seismic retrofit works completed for another building in Bangkok.

Mr Chair,

8 ASEAN recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in supply chain uncertainty and further delays in construction work. Nevertheless, we continue to urge the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly to support the timely completion of the project. Notwithstanding the delay in the commencement of construction work, we are encouraged by the assurances of the Secretary-General that the project completion date by the end of 2023 remains on schedule. We are also pleased to note the various comprehensive measures taken by the Secretary-General to mitigate the potential impact of the pandemic. That said, the report on the third Monte Carlo risk analysis in June 2020, which concluded that the project remains at significant risk of going over budget, raises some concerns. It is imperative that the Secretary-General ensures that the relevant risk mitigating measures are adopted in a timely manner.

9 The implementation of capital projects of the UN Regional Commissions to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Organisation remains an important priority for ASEAN. In this regard, we strongly support other projects such as the replacement of office blocks at the UN Office at Nairobi (UNON), works at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, and the renovation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago. ASEAN will follow all discussions on these items with close attention.

10 In closing, Mr Chair, allow me to reassure you of ASEAN's readiness to engage in constructive deliberations so that we can reach a positive and timely outcome on this important agenda item.

11 Thank you.

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