



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS BY THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 138: SEISMIC MITIGATION RETROFIT AND LIFE-CYCLE REPLACEMENTS PROJECT AT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC PREMISES IN BANGKOK, AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE, MAIN PART OF THE 76TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, 11 NOVEMBER 2021

Thank you, Mr Chair.

1 I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Agenda Item 138: Programme Budget for 2022, 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 on this item made by Guinea 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. We also express appreciation for Thailand's facilitation of ESCAP's work and reaffirm our support for ESCAP and its Executive Secretary, Armida Alisjahbana.

Mr Chair,

3 ESCAP serves 53 Member States and nine Associate Members. We should also recall that 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. To ensure that this work continues, it is critical to provide ESCAP, and indeed all United Nations Regional Commissions, with safe, suitable and accessible workplaces.

4 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 welcome the fifth audit report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) which noted that ESCAP is implementing the recommendations from the 2021 audit. ASEAN supports ESCAP's cost-saving measure of retaining all occupants on site during construction, without the requirement for off-site swing space. We continue to encourage the project team to explore new and innovative ways to conserve energy, derive cost savings, and reduce business disruption.

5 ASEAN also commends ESCAP's environmental management strategies. We are pleased to note that enhanced energy efficiencies will be achieved through several passive and active construction measures and design features of the building. ASEAN supports ESCAP's collaboration with experts to further enhance energy efficiencies. We also recognise that ESCAP remains committed to reducing its carbon footprint by establishing a system to promote staff awareness and conservation of energy and water.

6 ASEAN reiterates that, in implementing this project, special attention should be paid to the incorporation and use of local knowledge, materials, 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 consultations with the Metropolitan Authority on construction authorisation process, and knowledge sharing with the Council of Engineers of Thailand on best practices with regard to occupational safety and health in construction.

Mr Chair,

7 ASEAN recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in supply chain uncertainty and further delays in construction. 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 remains on schedule to be completed by the end of 2023. We are also pleased to note the various comprehensive measures taken by the Secretary-General to mitigate the potential impact of the pandemic, including the constant efforts to offset costs overruns resulting from the increase

in the currency exchange rates. That said, the report on the third Monte Carlo risk analysis in June 2021, 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.

8 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 closely.

9 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.

10 Thank you.

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