



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS BY MR TERRENCE TEO, COUNSELLOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 135: SEISMIC MITIGATION RETROFIT AND LIFE-CYCLE REPLACEMENTS PROJECT AT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC IN BANGKOK AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE, MAIN PART OF THE 74th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 29 OCTOBER 2019

Thank you, Chairman.

1 I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 Member States of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), on agenda item 135: Programme budget for 2020 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.

2 We thank Mr Chandru Ramanathan, Assistant Secretary-General and Controller in the Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget, for introducing the report of the Secretary-General on this matter. We also express our appreciation to Mr Cihan Terzi, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for introducing the Committee's related report.

3 ASEAN aligns itself with the statement made by Palestine on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr Chair,

4 The need to provide all United Nations Regional Commissions with safe, suitable, and accessible workplaces cannot be understated. In terms of the number of countries serviced, ESCAP is the largest, serving 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 having a more informed and improved implementation of the project's design and construction phases.

5 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. However, there remains much work to be done. To this end, ASEAN reaffirms our support for ESCAP and the stewardship of its Executive Secretary Armida Alisjahbana.

6 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 third audit report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in March 2019 which noted that ESCAP has addressed all recommendations from the previous OIOS audit of 2018 and is implementing the recommendations from the 2019 audit. In addition, ASEAN supports the Secretary-General's proposal to establish three temporary positions effective from 2020 for one Safety Project Officer, one Security Officer and one Information Technology Assistant for the on-site swing space. We encourage the project team to continue exploring new and innovative ways to optimise the use of space, conserve energy, derive cost savings, and reduce business disruptions, with due consideration given to the most cost-effective approach.

7 ASEAN commends ESCAP's efforts in implementing its environmental management strategies. We recognise that having achieved climate neutrality in its 2017 and 2018 operations, ESCAP remains committed at reducing its carbon footprint by establishing a system to promote staff awareness and conservation in areas such as energy, water, meetings and travel. We also welcome ESCAP's continued efforts to attract qualified female candidates to the project team. The UN needs to remain committed to improving gender parity and equitable geographical representation in the Organisation's workforce at all levels.

8 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* a meeting with the project team responsible for the renovation works at the UNICEF building in Bangkok, and a meeting with the Office of the Insurance Commission of Thailand to prepare its bid documents for construction works.

Mr Chair,

9 ASEAN continues to urge the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly to support the timely and complete implementation of the project. Notwithstanding the delay in the commencement of construction work, we are encouraged by the assurances of the Secretary-General that (a) the overall construction duration and project completion date by the end of 2023 remains on schedule; and (b) that the project budget remains unchanged at \$40.019 million, inclusive of contingency funding. That being said, the report on the second Monte Carlo risk analysis in May 2019, which concluded that the project remains at significant risk of going over budget, raises some concerns. It is imperative for the Secretary-General to ensure that the relevant risk mitigating measures are adopted in a timely manner.

10 The implementation of capital projects of the UN Regional Commissions to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Organization 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), renovation 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.

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

Thank you.

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