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## Asia-Pacific ‘regional parliament’ underway to advance equality, empowerment, for more than four billion citizens



**ESCAP** | The traditional parade of flags takes place at the opening of the seventy-fifth session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand. (29 May 2019)







The top United Nations body in the Asia-Pacific region opened its annual session (<https://www.unescap.org/commission/75/>) this week, calling for greater empowerment of disadvantaged and marginalized groups if the region is to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and fulfill its promise to leave no one behind.

According to a study by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP (<https://www.unescap.org/>)), forming the basis for intergovernmental discussions, while the benefits of economic growth and social progress have reached rural areas, persons with disabilities and women in many countries, the divide between the haves and the have-nots, is widening.

“In recent decades, quality of life has improved for most people in the region, yet, growing inequalities present a threat to further advances”, said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a video message (<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-05-27/secretary-generals-video-message-75th-session-of-the-economic-and-social-commission-for-asia-and-the-pacific>) for Monday’s opening session in Bangkok, Thailand. “The challenge is to ensure that socio-economic progress reaches those left behind,” he added.



Recalling his recent visit to the South Pacific, where he saw the “brutal” impact of the global “climate emergency”, Mr. Guterres called on countries to redouble efforts to combat climate change in Asia and the Pacific. “This is a battle we can and must win,” he underscored.



 **United Nations ESCAP**   
@UNESCAP 

A call to action ! At the current pace of progress, [#AsiaPacific](#) will not achieve any of the 17 [#SDG](#)’s according to our new SDG Progress Report. [bit.ly/2I3JWJs](https://bit.ly/2I3JWJs)

♡ 10 5:18 AM - May 28, 2019

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Informally dubbed the “parliament” of the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP – the UN’s socio-economic development arm for the area, which is home to more than 4 billion people, or nearly two-thirds of the world population – is a forum for Governments and other stakeholders to discuss key sustainable and inclusive development issues.

Established in 1947, it comprises 53 Member States and 9 associate members, stretching from the Pacific island of Tuvalu in the east, to Turkey in the west, and Russia in the north, to New Zealand in the south.

### **‘Opportunity’ to reaffirm ‘shared responsibility’**

Addressing the opening session, Armida Alisjahbana, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, urged countries to build on past successes and shape future priorities.

“Since this Commission first met in 1947, our countries have travelled a long journey,” she said, noting that many consider Asia-Pacific region as the “engine” of the world economy.

“We have yet more to offer. We can provide the global leadership to collectively achieve a transformed and resilient society in our region [and] respond to challenges that transcend borders and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>) (SDGs).”

In her policy statement, Ms. Alisjahbana outlined five key areas central to achieving that transformation: strengthening social protection; strengthening resilience to international trade tensions; fighting environmental degradation; improving resilience against disasters; and “unleashing” the potential of new technologies as a “force for good”.

“I am committed to working with all Member States to achieve transformed and resilient societies in our region. The evidence indicates we can be more effective if we empower citizens to support this transformation”, she concluded.

The opening session also heard a special address by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand – a UNESCO (<https://en.unesco.org/>) Goodwill Ambassador (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/goodwill-ambassadors/hrh-princess-maha-chakri-sirindhorn-of-thailand/>) for the empowerment of children through education, as well as an FAO Goodwill Ambassador (<http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/perspectives/zero-hunger/en/>) for zero hunger – in which she highlighted the importance of integrated and people-centred approach to development and that it should endure.

Development work should integrate dimensions and issues including healthcare, education and employment, she said, adding that “development work should not last only a few years but go on as long as possible.”

### **Mongolian Foreign Minister elected Chair**

Also on Monday, the Commission elected Damdin Tsogtbaatar, the Foreign Minister of Mongolia, as Chair of its 75th session.

In a speech following his election, Mr. Tsogtbaatar reiterated the importance of sustainable development, underscoring that the session is an “opportunity to accelerate the pace of implementation, shape policies and integrate the national strategies to reduce gap between rich and poor and threats from climate change.”

The opening day also saw ESCAP Executive Secretary Ms. Alisjahbana sign four Memoranda of Understanding with the regional and global organizations on strengthening cooperation in the areas of disaster resilience, early warning systems, renewable energy, research and evidence-based policy making.

Concluding on Friday, 31 May, the seventy-fifth session of ESCAP also includes the Commission’s high-level general debate on the theme “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality,” the meeting of the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries, a roundtable discussion with sub-regional organizations in the Asia-Pacific region, and a number of side events hosted by UN Member States and partner organizations.

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**27 March 2019** | [SDGs \(/en/news/topic/sdgs\)](#)

Nations across Asia and the Pacific need to take bold action to ensure empowerment, inclusiveness and equality if the region is to realize the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a major UN conference has heard.