Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Board, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First allow me to acknowledge the presence of His Excellency, Mr. Nguyen Chi Dung, Minister of Planning and Investment of Vietnam. It is an honor to have you at this Executive Board session.

The Asia Pacific is the most populous and diverse region in the world. Some countries have very youthful populations, and others are endeavoring to reap the demographic dividend, while an increasing number of countries are grappling with the challenges of a rapidly ageing population. The Asia Pacific is also the most disaster prone region in the world. The region is home to the very wealthy and the very poor. The wonderful ethnic and cultural diversity of its people represents the greatest wealth of the region.

We will be presenting seven Asia Pacific country programmes to the Executive Board this year — namely, Bangladesh, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam. These countries represent a combined total population of around 430 million people, and we propose to allocate approximately $75 million of UNFPA’s core, regular resources to the seven country programmes. I would like to thank Board members for their careful consideration of the CPDs and their thoughtful feedback throughout the review process.

Despite impressive progress made by all countries in the Asia Pacific Region in reducing maternal mortality, 83,000 women continue to die each year due to pregnancy and child birth. Hence, a common priority for the seven countries is to ensure that all pregnancies are wanted and all child births are safe. For example, in Bangladesh UNFPA will support the Government’s effort to expand family planning services, skilled birth attendance and emergency obstetric and newborn care, as part of its commitment to fulfilling the rights of women and girls. Eliminating child marriage will also be a critical part of this process. In Laos we will provide technical assistance to enhance implementation of the national family planning and midwifery strategies as part of our
support to Universal Health Coverage. In Iran, we will help institutionalize a maternal death surveillance system.

Another common objective shared by the new programmes is the empowerment of adolescents and youth. For example, in Thailand, Mongolia and Vietnam we will promote youth participation in policy making, particularly to advance adolescent reproductive health and rights, including the provision of youth-friendly services and comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

UNFPA is supporting efforts across the Asia Pacific Region to combat unacceptably high levels of violence against women and girls, including in Bangladesh, Laos and Mongolia. In Mongolia, we will build on the recent reform of existing legislation to criminalize domestic violence, and in Lao PDR, we will help our national partners to utilize data gathered in a gender-based violence prevalence study carried out with UNFPA support to formulate strategies for prevention. In Vietnam, we will support the development of multi-sectoral services aimed at preventing gender-based violence with the active participation of civil society. UNFPA has just launched a regional programme supported by the Government of Australia to build national capacities in the collection, analysis and use of data on violence against women and girls. We hope this will complement and reinforce efforts to eliminate gender-based violence within country programmes.

In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda of ‘leaving no one behind,’ our country programmes are putting special emphasis on reaching populations that have traditionally been excluded and discriminated against, such as indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, refugees and the disabled.

Across the region governments are placing priority on strengthening national capacities in the generation, analysis and use of data to move forward the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and are seeking UNFPA’s expertise and experience for this purpose.

In line with the Government of DPRK’s priorities UNFPA will focus its new Country Programme for the period 2017-2021 on the following areas: 1) increasing national capacity to deliver comprehensive maternal health and integrated sexual and reproductive health services and 2)

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strengthening national capacity to produce, analyze and disseminate high quality, disaggregated population data.

UNFPA's engagement in DPRK will on the whole focus on the national level. For example, we will provide technical assistance to develop and implement an equitable, rights-based national sexual and reproductive health strategy, and improve the quality of midwifery skills by providing training in medical colleges as well as in-service training. Through life saving interventions, such as the provision of reproductive health and midwifery kits, essential drugs and medicines, UNFPA aims to help ensure 350,000 safe deliveries each year. We shall also provide technical assistance to help the government to conduct the 2018 National Population and Housing Census in line with international standards by establishing an International Advisory Panel as was done in the 2008 census of DPRK. Building on good practices from the 2008 Census and the 2014 Social, Economic and Demographic Health Survey, UNFPA will work with the Government to ensure the consistency of national data for policy and programme development and implementation, including through access rights to UNFPA's international CO staff members from the conception of the project to its finalization; access in undertaking independent field-visits for quality assurance and working with the staff of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the national agency responsible for census, during data entry and processing, to review raw data-sets for internal consistency and validation of the data besides requesting for additional tabulations; and to provide, as necessary, additional theme-based analyses (gender, ageing, social-demographic profile etc.) written by international experts, in line with the mandate of CBS.

UNFPA will monitor programme implementation against baseline data through regular field visits to gather qualitative and quantitative information from the target provinces.

In Iran UNFPA will advocate for evidence informed policies and action plans to address population dynamics, including the current opportunity represented by the significant percentage of working age people, as well as the challenges presented by an aging population.

UNFPA will also work closely with the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to monitor progress against the 2013 Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration of the 6th Asian and Pacific Population Conference. UNFPA also co-chairs a regional interagency thematic working
group on statistics, which will complement national level work in SDG monitoring, including capacity building.

In designing the seven new country programmes jointly with our national partners, we have used evidence to ensure that the investments of funds, people and effort are focused on strategies that will have the greatest impact on the wellbeing and rights of the people of the seven countries, particularly women and young people, and especially the girls. We have also endeavored to closely align our programmes with national development priorities, the ICPD Programme of Action, the 2030 Agenda and our own Strategic Plan.

On the humanitarian front, UNFPA country offices are engaging with National Disaster Management Offices to ensure that the needs of women and girls are factored into national and sub-national disaster risk reduction and preparedness plans. In an effort to operationalize our commitments under the Grand Bargain, we are seeking to support local institutions and actors to assume leadership in the provision of life-saving services to women and girls in emergencies. Even as I speak, our office in Bangladesh is working with the government to deploy midwives in the worst flood affected area.

In addition to the $75 million in regular resources we propose to allocate for the new country programmes, UNFPA also aims to raise close to $65 million in non-core resources over the next five years. Each country office has developed a resource mobilization plan which takes account of the global shifts within the framework of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. For example, in Lao PDR and Bangladesh, we will support efforts to increase the investment of domestic resources in sexual and reproductive health.

UNFPA will endeavor to expand, strengthen and diversify partnerships, around the unfinished business of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda, seeking out public institutions, civil society organizations, business leaders, media, academia and others. South-South Cooperation is an important partnership and capacity building modality, with many countries in the region having good practices to share. For example, the new Thailand country programme will provide technical support to help ensure the quality of South-South exchanges, including through assistance to the Thailand International Cooperation Agency. UNFPA will also continue
participate actively in efforts toward United Nations System-wide coherence and cohesion, including Delivering as One, as in the case of Viet Nam.

In concluding, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the Governments of Bangladesh, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam for their valued partnership in the implementation of our current programmes, as well as in the design of our new country programmes. Thank you again.