

**Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov  
Officer-in-Charge,  
ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia**

**Opening Remarks**

**Virtual workshop: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Follow-up to the Voluntary National Reviews in the North and Central Asia region**

**Monday, 14 December 2020, virtual modality**

**10 am Almaty time**

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**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Welcome to the Virtual Workshop on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Follow-up to the Voluntary National Reviews in the North and Central Asia region.

The current situation with the COVID-19 is a clear indicator that countries need to strengthen their actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will help to recover in a sustainable way.

Even in the pre COVID-19, ESCAP analysis showed that the countries in the North and central Asia were not on track to achieve several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, these member States were experiencing reverse trends in several SDGs, including gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), climate change (Goal 13), and preserve life on land (Goal 15). With the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, there is a major concern to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.

Governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders have been making sustained efforts to address the challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

All countries in our subregion have conducted VNR, with three (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) having completed a second review, also Azerbaijan will present the third VNR in 2021.

*Note: Armenia in 2018 & 2020; Azerbaijan in 2017, 2019 & 2021; Georgia in 2016 & 2020; Kazakhstan in 2019; Kyrgyzstan in 2020; Russia in 2020; Tajikistan in 2017; Turkmenistan in 2019; Uzbekistan in 2020.*

This Workshop provides a timely opportunity to address gaps and discuss solutions that have been identified in the VNRs in close coordination and multi-stakeholders' partnerships with representatives from governments, civil society, business, academia and youth.

ESCAP stands ready to work with governments and all stakeholders in designing and advancing SDGs implementation plans.

One of these tools developed by our office is the SDG Drivers Framework for North and Central Asia. The SDG Drivers Framework for North and Central Asia aims to support countries in the region to identify potential drivers that can accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The framework consists of a toolbox of methodologies to map out potential drivers and the components which enable these drivers and helps to prioritize sustainable development outcomes in North and Central Asia.

ESCAP will continue to work closely with our member States from the North and Central Asia in supporting the SDGs policy designs and programmes.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of this Workshop towards attainment of Sustainable Development Goals and count on your commitment to build back better in North and Central Asia.

I wish you a successful discussion during the VNR Workshop.

Thank you.