COMMUNICATION OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSON

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. Let me first express my sincere thanks to the Secretary General of UNWTO, Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili and his wonderful team for their swift coordination efforts and unwavering support in light of the evolving situation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. As you are aware, the year 2019 ended on a hopeful note for the global tourism industry and particularly for the Asia-Pacific region. According to the 2018 UNWTO/GTERC Asia Tourism Trends report, Asia-Pacific was the fastest growing region for the period of 2005-2017 with an average growth of 6% per year compared to the world average of 4%.

3. The unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 crisis has since brought global tourism to a standstill with travel restrictions imposed in almost all destinations. Furthermore, Asia-Pacific was the first region to suffer and the worst hit. At the onset of the crisis, research by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated a loss of up to US$ 800 billion to the tourism GDP with nearly 49 million jobs at risk in the region.

4. More recently, as of 15 June 2020, these numbers have been revised upwards by the WTTC, with estimated declines of US$ 980 billion (33%) to tourism GDP and 59.7 million jobs lost in the best-case scenario, or US$ 1.89 trillion (63%) and 115 million jobs lost in the worst case, as compared with 2019 levels.

5. However, all is not lost as every crisis presents an opportunity to rebound bigger and better than before. It is encouraging to note that most countries in the region are beginning to see positive developments with the easing of restrictions towards a gradual recovery. In fact, Asia
and the Pacific is expected to rebound first according to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (May 2020), as this region has seen a change of trend earlier and is less affected by seasonality towards year end.

6. Towards this end, I would like to applaud the UNWTO for leading the global recovery effort with various initiatives for the tourism sector that have benefited us tremendously in this region, which include:

- The establishment of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee;
- Launch of the Healing Solutions for Tourism Challenge;
- Recommendations for Action to Mitigate the Impact of Covid-19 and Accelerate Recovery;
- Monitoring of Country-by-Country Measures Taken to Support Travel and Tourism; and

7. As Chair of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, I believe we are poised for a comeback and we can accelerate this by building on the successes and solidarity that we have achieved in combating Covid-19, towards restoring trust and confidence to travel again in this region.

8. In this turbulent time of health, economic and political crisis that is unfolding around the world, we are thankful for the opportunity to connect with the UNWTO and members of the commissions more than ever before in the pursuit of innovative solutions and collective action.

9. I wish to encourage all of you to make your utmost contributions to the discussion and deliberations of this session, which will go a long way towards reaffirming our close partnership for a stronger and better tourism industry post-Covid-19.

Thank you.