Good morning everyone! Marhabaa and Welcome to the Maldives! It is my utmost pleasure, as the Chair of the 34th CAP-CSA Joint Meeting, to host you all here in the Sunny Side of life, along with my Co-Chair Mr. Mohd Zamri Mat Zain, Deputy Secretary-General, Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture of Malaysia. Also, a very warm welcome to our Secretary General H. E. Zurab Pololikashvili, who, with his strong leadership have helped steer UNWTO to where it is today, amongst the challenging trials of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is indeed a great pleasure to have you all here on our Golden Jubilee year of Tourism.

Tourism suffered the greatest crisis on record in 2020 following an unprecedented health, social and economic emergency with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) plunged by 73% in 2020 due to a global lockdown, widespread travel restrictions and a massive drop in demand. Asia and the Pacific region saw the largest drop with an 84% decrease in arrivals, about 300 million less than in 2019. As tourism was and still remains a key source of foreign revenue for this region, with 4.4% of the region’s total GDP accounting to Tourism (in 2019), the Asia-Pacific region has undoubtedly felt the shock of the pandemic on a substantial level. As of November 2021, Asia and the Pacific remained as the region with the most restrictions in place, with 65% of all destinations completely closed.

Coming back to 2022, International tourism has continued its steady recovery into the year, with a noticeably improved performance compared to the weak start of 2021. In 2022, world arrivals have more than doubled compared to January 2021, with an increase of 18 million. Asia and the Pacific have experienced the largest decrease in international arrivals over 2019 (-93%) as several destinations still remain closed to non-essential travel.
As we rethink to revive tourism, I stand with our SG Mr. Zurab’s words that, I quote, “The safe easing or lifting of restrictions on travel are essential for the restarting of tourism and in obtaining the return of the social and economic benefits the sector offers”. The economic importance of tourism is considerable in Asia Pacific economies, some of which have enjoyed the largest increase in Tourism Direct GDPs (TDGDPs) during the last ten years or so. This is why, I would like to emphasize on the importance of restarting tourism, especially in our Asia-Pacific region where the economies are heavily dependent on tourism. Having said that, the safety of tourists and the local community shall be the utmost priority, and I believe that the Maldives can be taken as a prime example that safety and tourism can co-exist in harmony.

Though the road to recovery is still uncertain and many challenges remain, global coordination through similar platforms will open up the opportunity to build back more comprehensively towards a sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector for the future. Now more than ever, we are in need of an internationally united tourism sector to drive sustainable growth and improve resiliency, for the millions of people whose future depends on this industry.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for supporting and accepting our invitation for this event, which will hopefully enable us to gather our ideas and create a new vision for the global tourism industry especially to the Asia Pacific Region. I hope you’ve felt the warmth of the Maldivian hospitality – and weather as well! Thank you everyone once again, I hope that this commission meeting proves to be beneficial and that you will all take away valuable knowledge that will contribute to the betterment of tourism in your respective countries.