Honourable Ministers,

Dear Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is mandated to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of nuclear science and technology to promote health and sustainable development. It helps countries access technologies that support them in establishing high-quality health care, and works closely with key partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), leading NGOs and international financial institutions.

In pursing these efforts, the IAEA gives high priority to partnerships to help improve the health of the population of South-East Asia. The IAEA works closely with the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) and Country Offices to address non-communicable diseases such as cancer. It also works with SEARO on nutrition and, recently, on COVID-19.

Together with WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the IAEA helps countries develop comprehensive cancer control programmes, by assisting them to assess their needs and formulate evidence-based health policies. Despite the pandemic, in 2021, for instance, a cancer control needs assessment (iMPACT Review) for Nepal was completed, and technical support for Sri Lanka has already been initiated to support the development of their national strategy to improve radiotherapy services.

In terms of COVID-19 response, the IAEA responded quickly from the outset of the pandemic, delivering COVID-19 kits, diagnostic equipment (specifically RT-PCR) and personal protective equipment to countries and territories around the world. By the end of August 2021, the IAEA had provided support to almost 130 countries and territories, including Member States in this region.

In 2020, the IAEA and WHO collaborated to enhance the coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic through a joint webinar series designed to strengthen the testing capacities of laboratories that received PCR-RT equipment and kits from the IAEA, and of WHO accredited laboratories. In addition, in early 2021, the IAEA and WHO-SEARO developed a second series of joint webinars on: a) detection and investigation of the new variants; b) basic bio safety and bio security considerations; and c) sustainable management of diagnostic laboratories (Networks). The webinar recordings are available at the IAEA Human Health Campus (https://humanhealth.iaea.org/HHW/index.html).

In June last year, the IAEA launched the Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) to strengthen global preparedness to tackle future zoonotic diseases outbreaks by contributing to establish a worldwide network of national veterinary laboratories – many in South-East Asia - and strengthen their technical capacities for the monitoring, surveillance, early detection and control of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19, Ebola and Zika.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IAEA is supporting South-East Asian countries in combatting malnutrition. While good progress has been made in improving breastfeeding rates and stunting in children in this region, more can and should be done on this front. Stable isotope techniques (non-radioactive) generate accurate data that provide evidence for improving nutrition interventions and programmes. Through these techniques, several South-East Asia countries have the capacity to assess breastfeeding practices, micronutrient absorption from foods, the link between acute malnutrition and later diseases.
To conclude, I would like to use this opportunity to stress once again the importance of partnerships. Only by working hand-in-hand can we tackle the great challenges that lie ahead. For this reason, we have forged several strategic partnerships aimed at assisting our Member States from this region to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. Our objective is to help countries build their capacities and fulfil their development potential. And we will remain WHO’s committed partner in its noble mission of promoting and improving access to universal healthcare in South-East Asia.

Thank you.