

## Programme

# High-Level Meeting on Regional Cooperation for Trade and Transport Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics in Asia and the Pacific

**2 December 2020**

**15:00 – 17:00 Bangkok time (GMT+7)**

**16:00 – 18:00 Manila time (GMT+8)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an overwhelming impact on global economy. Global output may drop by about 10%, while trade flows are also projected to decline in double-digits in 2020.

Trade and transport connectivity has become a central consideration in the pandemic response, as the COVID-19 containment measures restricted cross-border trade and transport operations, contributing to rising trade costs in Asia and the Pacific and world-wide. Latest WTO estimates suggest that transport and travel costs have the highest potential to make the most significant impact on international trade amid the pandemic. In freight sector, transport containment measures could reduce global freight transport volumes by up to 36 per cent by the end of 2020 with the highest reduction projected for South East Asia, Central Asia and parts of South Asia. Additional inspections, reduced hours of operation, road closures, border closures, increases in transport costs, etc. could lead to an increase in trade costs of 25 per cent, given the scale of the impact and the severity of the containment measures.

Accordingly, addressing bottlenecks in trade and transport facilitation has become a crucial policy lever to keep trade flowing, save livelihoods, and enhance recovery. This requires enhancing efficiency and transparency of policy actions and greater regional cooperation to forestall protectionism and implement trade and transport reforms.

This entails, however, tackling major weaknesses in the cross-border trade operations and the dedicated transport and logistics chains, as evidenced by the pandemic. While implementation of trade and transport facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific has progressed steadily, most countries in the region still need to make significant progress in trade and transport facilitation and in the use of technologies to ensure seamless transport and trade connectivity. The prevalence of physical interface points and manual, paper submissions further slowdown trade in an era of lockdowns and physical distancing. Divergent transport standards feed the need for numerous checkups and inspections. Limited use of intermodal solutions undermines the resilience of the freight transport sector.

Against that background and building up on the initial regional discussions on the Supply Chains and Connectivity<sup>1</sup> and the Asia and the Pacific Transport Forum 2020<sup>2</sup>, this virtual regional meeting will explore how trade and transport facilitation measures can be implemented more effectively during and in the aftermath of the unprecedented crisis to improve the countries' resilience. It will focus on the proven and emerging best practices, including digitalization reforms, and on the concrete ways to foster greater regional cooperation towards ensuring resilience and efficiency of trade and transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unescap.org/events/2020-regional-conversation-4>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.adb.org/news/events/transport-forum-2020>

## AGENDA

**2 December 2020 (Bangkok time)**

- 15:00 – 15:20      **Opening and welcome remarks**
- Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana**  
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations  
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP
- Mr. Bambang Susantono**, Vice-President, Knowledge Management and Sustainable  
Development, ADB
- 15:20 – 15:35      **Presentation on trade and transport connectivity in the age of pandemics:  
opportunities for strengthening regional cooperation**
- Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina Ducrest**, Chief, Transport Connectivity and Logistics Section,  
Transport Division, ESCAP
- Mr. Ronald Butiong**, Chief of Regional Cooperation and Integration Thematic Group, ADB
- 15:35 – 16:30      **Panel discussion**
- Moderator: Mr. Joseph Zveglic Jr.**, Deputy Chief Economist, Economic Research and  
Regional Cooperation Department, ADB
- Panelists:**
- **Mr. Tipu Munshi**, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh
  - **Mr. Jasurbek Choriyeu**, Deputy Minister of Transport, Uzbekistan
  - **Mr. Kunio Mikuriya**, Secretary General, WCO
  - **Mr. Norbert Kouwenhoven**, World Wide Authorities Leader, TradeLens (IBM)
  - **Ms. Sabrina Varma**, Aid for Trade/Trade and Development Adviser, Department  
of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
- 16:30 – 16:50      **Q & A**
- 16:50 – 17:00      **Closing remarks**