Remarks by the BIMSTEC Secretary General at the 5th Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific
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- Executive Secretary UNESCAP
- Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Distinguished members of the UNESCAP Secretariat, Ladies and Gentlemen

Namaskar, a very good morning to you all!

I am delighted to participate at the Opening Session of the 5th Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. I thank the Executive Secretary of the UNESCAP for her invitation.

I want to begin by thanking the Executive Secretary of the UNESCAP for the longstanding cooperation between the UNESCAP and BIMSTEC, assisting BIMSTEC in realizing sustainable development goals of its member States. I hope the UNESCAP under her leadership shall continue to attach a high priority to cooperation with BIMSTEC in future.

While the significance of regional cooperation in realizing shared developmental and security goals has always been recognized, its salience has grown under the present circumstances. As we all know, the rules-based international order is under tremendous strain. The conflicts in various parts of the world have impacted adversely the countries in Asia and the Pacific. We are faced with massive disruptions in global politics, economy and trade. Due to aggravating divides, the salience of global multilateralism and multilateral institutions, such as the UN Bodies and International Organizations, has declined. Under these circumstances, regional multilateralism provides the way forward for collective action to deal with global challenges like climate change, technological disruptions, disruptions in global trade and supply chains etc.

Regional Organizations, like BIMSTEC, bring together a small number of countries, with shared developmental and security challenges. Their small membership makes it easy for them to build convergences and find regionally acceptable solutions. Moreover, they are less vulnerable to upheavals in global politics. They provide an effective, effifient and resilient way to deal with the developmental and security challenges, including through space cooperation.

The BIMSTEC member States have recognised space technology as an important enabler for sustainable and inclusive development. Further, the Bay of Bengal region is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. The space-based applications, including remote sensing, satellite communication, navigation and weather forecasting, offer valuable tools for strengthening early warning systems, improving disaster preparedness and response, managing natural resources and addressing other emerging environmental challenges. Harnessing these technologies through regional cooperation, anchored by Regional Organisations like BIMSTEC, can significantly improve the capabilities of the countries in a region to anticipate risks, mitigate vulnerabilities and protect the lives and livelihoods of the people.

Accordingly, the BIMSTEC member States have decided to set up a BIMSTEC Working Group on Space Cooperation to devise an Action Plan for cooperation in Space Applications and Technologies. Since India has developed advanced capabilities in space infrastructure, applications and technologies, it has offered to assist other BIMSTEC member States in domain of space application and the Working Group will initiate implementation of these proposals.

Let me speak briefly about BIMSTEC. BIMSTEC was conceived in 1997, in Bangkok by its founding members, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as a platform for bringing together South Asia and South-East Asia; two ASEAN members Myanmar and Thailand are BIMSTEC members. BIMSTEC, which was conceived as a non-political organization, focuses on forging tangible cooperation, enjoys the requisite political support of all its members and it has stayed away from political issues.

Since BIMSTEC member States face similar developmental and security challenges, which they cannot address alone, they consider BIMSTEC a vital instrument for realization of their security and sustainable development goals. The geographical contiguity, historical linkages and shared cultural heritage of the 7 member States, provide a solid foundation for forging regional cooperation under BIMSTEC.

BIMSTEC has made progress in creating its institutional architecture, including its permanent secretariat, which is located in Dhaka. It has its own Charter and its vision is reflected in BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030. It has succeeded in creating institutional mechanisms for forging multisectoral cooperation. BIMSTEC has a vast and diverse range of sectors on its Agenda for regional cooperation.

BIMSTEC has well-established core mechanisms, like Senior Officials Meetings, Ministerial Meetings and Summits. There are Senior Officials and Ministerial Meetings in certain sectors. There are sectoral Working Groups, Expert Groups and their Sub-Groups. Action Plans and Master Plans for cooperation in various Sectors have been concluded and are being

implemented. BIMSTEC has set up 5 BIMSTEC Centres, including 2 in India, 1 in Bhutan, 1 in Sri Lanka and 1 in Thailand. There are proposals to set up 10 more BIMSTEC Centres - 4 in India; 2 in Bangladesh; 2 in Sri Lanka; 1 in Thailand; and 1 in Nepal. BIMSTEC has negotiated numerous Conventions, Agreements as well as MoUs and MoAs.

With the entry into force of BIMSTEC Charter, BIMSTEC has become an internationally recognized legal entity, enabling it to forge external partnerships and accept Observers and new Members. BIMSTEC has been seeking developmental partnerships with non-members as well as the UN, International and Regional Organisations. BIMSTEC has existing partnerships with ADB, WB, IFPRI, IORA and UNODC. Apart from UNESCAP, BIMSTEC has been exploring partnerships with ASEAN, FAO, ITU, WHO, WIPO, UNDRR, UNEP, UNESCO, UNOPS and UN Women etc.

BIMSTEC thus provides a conducive and effective regional platform for promoting cooperation amongst the countries of Bay of Bengal region in Space Applications.

I would like to conclude by commending again UNESCAP for providing opportunities to regional and sub-regional organizations of Asia and the Pacific to attend this highly valuable Ministerial Conference on a very pertinent topic. I again thank UNESCAP for inviting me to participate in this Conference. I thank you all for your kind attention. I wish this Conference success in attaining its goals and wish you all a pleasant and meaningful day.