

## Welcome Remarks by Secretary-General Dr. AKP Mochtan

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

Greetings from the APO Secretariat and a very warm welcome to the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Governing Body, our first-ever virtual GBM. I am very pleased to see that our bond remains as strong as ever despite the physical and geographical distance that separates us today.

The past few months have been very challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic came out of the blue, and we monitor with great concerns how deeply it affects the entire world, including our member countries. The Secretariat, too, is not spared from this ordeal. Overnight, practically all the APO's activities, both multicountry and in-country, were brought to a halt. Not wanting to be idle, the Secretariat made a switch to a digital platform as the pandemic continued. We introduced interactive, live broadcasts on key productivity topics via YouTube.

In two months, in April and May 2020, we got more than 20,000 views and 1,000 subscribers. This encourages us to maximize the use of the digital platform. A pilot hybrid platform for multicountry projects was developed. We also embarked on digital in-country services for the member countries. The Secretariat is now preparing a strategic plan to upgrade inhouse digital capability and maximize the APO digital platform.

Chair, Distinguished Directors, We now enter a "new normal." This is a heartening progress, but many challenges remain. Immediate to the Secretariat is the implementation of 2020 projects for the rest of this year. In an optimistic scenario, we are hopeful to resume face-to-face multicountry projects beginning from August. In worst-case scenario, we may not be able to organize *any* face-to-face projects in 2020. The Secretariat will submit assessment and recommendations of this situation at the end of July.

The Secretariat is also cognizant of the difficulties faced by the member countries in the light of the pandemic. We have incorporated our thoughts to support the member countries in our proposals for the utilization of unappropriated surplus. These include setting up a Special Account and returning a portion of the surplus to offset the membership contributions of 2021. I look forward to the discussions on these proposals at the next agenda item.

Other than challenges, we will also have opportunities. We will celebrate our 60th anniversary – the Diamond Jubilee; launch the APO Vision 2025; and have a new group of the APO Regional and National awardees. These will allow us to consolidate the APO's standing in the region.

Both the challenges and opportunities underline the importance of *adaptability*: it is not the strongest who survive, but those most responsive to change. Let us continue to find new, innovative solutions to tackle upcoming challenges *creatively*.

I would like to express appreciation to Thailand as the APO Chair for guidance on holding this virtual GBM and to the Government of Fiji for its preparations to host the physical meeting in April, which was unfortunately cancelled because of the pandemic. I also warmly welcome Turkey as the APO's twenty-first and newest member. Finally, I congratulate Vietnam on assuming the role of new APO Chair, and Bangladesh and Cambodia as the new Vice Chairs.

Thank you for your continued support, please stay healthy and safe.

Together, we will emerge stronger, wiser, and more vibrant.

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