H.E. Ambassador Federico Villegas (Argentina)
Chair of the Advisory Body for the year 2020-2021
Item 12 (a), 24 June 2021, 3 p.m.

Madam President,
Distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to report on the work of the Advisory Body that was established by paragraph 166 of the Bangkok Plan of Action. The Advisory Body met in May 2021 and during its meeting it reviewed the activities of the flagship programme of UNCTAD since July 2020.

The curricula for regional courses illustrate the formulation of development policies and strategies, within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, the programme was further developed to incorporate perspectives on resilience in responding to multiple economic shocks.

To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening the overall framework for development policies by adding a component on resilience is essential to provide policymakers with tools for stronger policy formulation. The training includes a number of lectures on economic, trade and finance theories and their relevance to policy development, the role of investment and technology, and detailed case studies and lessons learned from previous policy decisions. It is designed to promote critical thinking, with emphasis placed on policy design, coherence, coordination, implementation and measurement. Central to the programme are simulation exercises, examinations and critiques of best practices in policy development.

The Advisory Board received several proposals for hosting the regional courses in the Asia and Pacific region and in the Latin America and Caribbean region. The Advisory Board agreed that Argentina would host the courses for Latin America and the Caribbean, and that Pakistan would host the courses for Asia and the Pacific.

Under the UNCTAD multi-year venue agreement, each country will host three editions of the regional courses. The Foreign Service Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan will become the multi-year venue over five years in the Asia and Pacific region and the University of Buenos Aires, School of Economic Sciences in Argentina will become the multi-year venue over five years in the Latin America and Caribbean region.
The UNCTAD regional courses in multi-year venues continue to be an innovative way of raising support, gaining experiences from various economies and enhancing bilateral cooperation at the country level. The contribution of national experts in shedding light on national and regional experiences is of significance to the programme’s curricula in enhancing knowledge and boosting human capital among policymakers.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, the programme had significant achievements. It conducted a survey of 200 of its alumni on their careers and perspectives during the pandemic, and how COVID-19 impacted their professions. The survey findings will inform future research and feed into a curriculum for a forthcoming e-learning course on building resilience that will also target policymakers in various capitals of the five developing regions.

The programme supports collaboration at all levels – national, regional and international – for member States and their policymakers as well as Geneva-based delegates. In particular, UNCTAD collaboration with United Nations economic commissions brings into the curricula regional perspectives by highlighting the economic challenges faced and zooming in on countries’ experiences in the various regions.

From September 2020 to May 2021, the secretariat delivered seven short courses for Geneva-based delegates on recent UNCTAD research on interrelated development, economic and trade matters, incorporating the COVID-19 pandemic and its ramifications. A total of 191 delegates attended these courses, of which 40 per cent were women.

The short courses provide a platform where UNCTAD experts are given the opportunity to present their recent research to delegates, while the comments and questions from delegates provide relevant input and generate potential research topics for UNCTAD work. This fosters a dialogue and information sharing between UNCTAD researchers and Geneva-based representatives of member States and bridges the knowledge gap.

In addition, evaluations by previous participants to this programme illustrated increased integration in decision-making processes. As the programme is embedded in a knowledge-based, capacity-building framework, it heavily focuses on sharing and disseminating information with policymakers and government officials in relevant departments. It was also reported that deepened knowledge on development and economic matters was acquired.
The content of the regional courses was relevant to the professional duties of the participants, who indicated a strengthened ability to apply the lessons learned that emerged from the course. Participants indicated that the knowledge they had gained from previous UNCTAD regional courses was useful to them in formulating policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included, among others, the areas of policies on trade in the post-pandemic era, improving analysis and statistics sources, trade negotiations and trade facilitation and logistics. Sharing and disseminating knowledge they gained from previous courses was also emphasized as one of main strengths of the programme.

Madam President,

The positive feedback received for the courses can only be generated through carefully designed curricula and delivery, which led to this positive impact on the knowledge and skills of policymakers. To this end, the involvement of UNCTAD experts, regional commissions and national experts, and the Policy Capacity-Building Section of the Knowledge Development Branch, consistently ensures the quality and excellence of the paragraph 166 regional approach.

In this regard, I wish to extend the appreciation of the Advisory Body to the member States that are the hosts in the current cycle of regional courses: Egypt, Kenya and North Macedonia.

I also wish to thank the members of the Advisory Body, namely Albania, Belgium, Cameroun, Czechia, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, France, Kenya, Myanmar, Oman and Pakistan, for their contribution in providing the necessary guidance and support to the Acting Secretary-General of UNCTAD in the implementation of this important flagship capacity-building programme and laying the way forward.

Finally, I congratulate Her Excellency Ambassador Tarishi on her appointment as the new Chair of the Advisory Body and wish her a fruitful and successful term.

This concludes my report to the Trade and development Board. A full and more comprehensive report is contained in document TD/B/68/CRP.1

Thank you Madam President