



GCSS-XII GMEF
20-22 February, 2012

Serving People
and the Planet

Statement of Acceptance

By

H.E. Mr. Federico Ramos de Armas
President of the twelve special session of the UNEP Governing
Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

Under

Agenda Item 2(a) – Election of Officers

Check against Delivery

Monday, 20 February 2012
11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Conference Room 2

Honourable Ministers

Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. **Let me express, first of all, my sincere thanks for electing me as President of the twelfth special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. It is a great honor for me and for the Government of Spain to be entrusted with this important task at a time when we are preparing for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June this year. I represent a country, Spain, well known for being its deep commitment to the protection of our natural capital both at home and abroad. I assume this responsibility determined to pursue our goals for the benefit of all represented in this room.**
2. **Secondly, I want to express, in the name of all the delegates, our sincere gratitude for the hospitality shown to all of us by the authorities and the people of this great country, the Republic of Kenya,** whose policies regarding the protection of their magnificent natural inheritance are an example of sensibility and commitment
3. The Government of Spain as President of the Governing Council has worked closely with UNEP, the Bureau and member states in addressing the critical decisions needed to ensure that the voices and the messages from the Forum are heard both loud and clear.
4. We have seen a positive evolution and focused discussion on the themes of green economy and international environmental governance which both were themes discussed at this Forum last year. I think we can take credit for inspiring global leaders further to discuss these two crucial issues.
5. **In the preparatory process towards Rio+20, this twelfth special session provides us with another unique opportunity to help shape the discussions and outcomes of this important conference. As President of the Council/Forum, I will ensure that policy makers, civil society, the scientific world, and the global community at large are continuously reminded about the environmental challenges that confront us today and where solutions, simply cannot wait any longer.** This is the time to ensure a viable and inclusive way forward for the future sustainability of our planet.

Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

6. We cannot afford complacency. We all in this room agree that time is running out. We need 2012 to be a landmark year in which we jointly define how the governments of the world will address today's sustainable challenge for future generations. It has been 20 years since Governments and world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro to debate the concept and implications of "sustainable development". We know a lot more today than we knew then about the magnitude and multiple challenges before us in the context of tackling climate change, poverty, chemicals management, freshwater and oceans governance, biodiversity loss and increased pollution just to mention a few.
7. We also came to the **realization that our natural resources are finite and that we need economic models that boost economic growth and protect the environment. These do not need to be in contradiction, but on the contrary they must work together for the benefit of our societies. In other words: green must be seen as an opportunity for growth, today more than ever in the context of the financial crisis that we are suffering. We must work together**, public and private sector, civil society and international organizations in order to find the way out of this situation. I firmly believe that we can provide the people of this planet with the means for a dignified living without compromising a healthy environment. We can lead prosperous nations in a protected planet.
8. **This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the foundation of UNEP. I should like to honor the presence of the 4 Executive Directors of UNEP who are present with us today and the first Executive Director who was unable to join us. It has been through your leadership, commitment and dedication that we stand here debating about the great topics that mark our planet today.** The environmental movement has moved a long way from the 1960s when it began to crystallize, with Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring", as one of its major catalyzes. Fast forward 50 years from that initial seed and we find a new and different landscape where the environmental community is centrally placed.
9. **Allow me also to express my appreciation for the role that civil society has played not only in the creating of UNEP as the UN voice for environment, but also for advancing the environmental and sustainable development agenda at all levels.** I am one of

those convinced that we need to work hand in hand with civil society if we wish to succeed in advocating and promoting the changes that are necessary for a sustainable future in all corners of the world. This is a fundamental lesson we have learned in Spain over the past few decades. I trust that many of you in this room have had similar experiences in your countries.

Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

10. As a community, we share a common purpose and need global solutions. It is true that there have been important achievements over the past decades. UNEP has been instrumental in providing the scientific and policy foundation. Environmental governance continues to be on the top of the agenda and, most recently, in the larger context of the institutional framework for sustainable development. But also, let me insist, that these achievements cannot lull us into complacency.
11. **The entire GEO 5 process that will converge in June of this year, will give us an important glimpse into the state, trends and outlook of the environment. I am confident that the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) which is expected to be fully operational in 2012 will turn out to be the true leading global body that we need, providing scientifically sound and relevant information to support more informed decisions on how biodiversity and ecosystem services are conserved and used around the world.** The catalytic work of the IPCC on climate change and the green economy, as a vehicle towards a low-carbon and resource efficient society, is an element that governments all over the world are looking at as a solution for the years and decades to come.
12. **This Council/Forum has a final opportunity to provide input into Rio +20 and the preparatory processes. It is critical that we make our voices heard in Rio and influence the outcome of the Conference.** The outcome of Rio+20 will shape the debate on environment and sustainable development for decades to come. I plead to all of us to use this Forum to ensure that Rio+20 becomes a success, for the shake of the environment.
13. Rio+20 has the task of formulating a viable framework to stimulate sustainable patterns of production and consumption that can reverse the negative trends affecting the natural environment.

14. As we face this task, it is encouraging to see that many countries, including small island developing states, view environmental investments as a source for innovation, capacity building, socio-economic inclusiveness and growth.

15. **As a representative of a government I'm always aware of our responsibility ensuring a transparent regulatory framework as the basis on which environmental governance has to be founded.** This is the first step to achieve sustainable development.

16. The sense of stewardship and recognition that the natural capital of the planet should not and cannot be on a collision course with economic development is a great achievement. Challenges and opportunities are but both sides of the same coin when we talk about environmental protection. I applaud those countries for demonstrating responsible leadership in the context of economic growth and I invite others to follow.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

17. This Council/Forum, will discuss the two main themes of Rio +20: the Green Economy and the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development. Let us use this moment in history to come together and remind ourselves of the "the big picture" and recognize the role and responsibility that we have in crafting the sustainability of our planet and bright future for all. You can be sure you can count on me and the Government of Spain for all those initiatives aimed at bringing all of our countries and stakeholders together in pursuit of sustainable development.

18. **I would like to congratulate the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Steiner, for continuously advancing the agenda in terms of the green economy and moving the debate towards more functional and practical areas.** Similarly, we must recognize your efforts in helping member states identify suitable and viable options that formulate an institutional framework for sustainable development. **UNEP's contributions in these areas reaffirm UNEP's position at the center of the great debates of our time. I very much look forward to continuously working with you and your team.**

Distinguished delegates,
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19. I count on you in ensuring that our deliberations over the next three days will take place in a spirit of cooperation and common purpose. The members of the Bureau and myself remain at your disposal to ensure that all voices are heard and that our common purpose sets forth a unified momentum will set our planet on a sustainable path.

Thank you.