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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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“Rio+20 and beyond: Responding to the challenges”

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**Mr. President,
Executive Director Steiner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

[INTRODUCTION]

It’s an honour to be with you today.

You are meeting at a critical moment in the preparations for Rio+20.

As you know, we are now just four months away, and the clock is counting down. Expectations for its outcomes are high. So are our responsibilities.

When government leaders gather in Rio in June, the world expects them to sign off on ambitious and action-focused outcomes that equal the magnitude of today's challenges.

Eradicating poverty, building socially just and inclusive societies while protecting our fragile ecosystems, remain the defining challenge of the 21st century.

The multiple crises we contend with today – food, energy, climate, water, natural disasters, urbanization, finance, employment and more – shape the different facets of this challenge. They remind us that our problems are interconnected, and must be tackled together.

They remind us of the fundamental importance of integrating the three pillars of sustainable development. Without such integration, there will be little progress in implementation.

Therefore, Rio+20 must be a conference on coherence, integration, and implementation.

At Rio, we need strong decisions on both themes of the Conference – strong in commitments, and strong in actions.

Ultimately, whether or not the Conference advances implementation – *that* should be the criterion to assess Rio+20. *Not* whether we have another document.

We have Agenda 21, the JPOI and other agreements.

What we need is a robust outcome, with reinvigorated political commitments to action, by all countries.

Indeed, it is that spirit - as we see it - that is driving the current negotiations.

As you know, the preparatory process has now entered the critical phase of consultations and negotiations on the draft outcome document.

In late January, we held a meeting to exchange comments on the first part of the zero draft. While everyone accepted it as the basis for negotiations, there were also calls for raising its level of ambition and action.

We are hoping your Governments will take on that challenge and come to an early agreement on an ambitious outcome – an outcome that is focused on action and that makes a difference in years to come.

More than anything else, we want to see proposals and commitments for concrete actions to advance sustainable development. We want to see an agreed framework for action in the priority areas identified during the preparatory process so far.

The deadline for Member States to submit proposals on the rest of the zero draft of the outcome document is February 29. All these proposals will be compiled, and negotiations will continue.

I appeal to you to help raise the level of ambition through your national proposals.

[OUTLINE OF THE FINAL AGREEMENT]

While we are beginning to see the outline of the final agreement, we are far from knowing the concrete actions to which Governments will commit.

Let me present the outline as I see it at this point. The final agreement should feature:

- 1) a reaffirmation of political commitments for sustainable development, at a time when commitments seems weak, and governments are preoccupied with short-term crises;**
- 2) an agreement to work on greening our economies, or a roadmap, according to its proponents, which includes:**
 - a framework of actions to guide those efforts;**
 - national strategies that contribute to environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive growth; and**
 - a knowledge platform, toolkits and a capacity mechanism to support efforts of developing countries;**
- 3) decisions to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development, including:**
 - strengthening UNEP as the core of the environmental pillar, through universal membership, stronger finances and, for quite a number of member States and stakeholders, elevation to a specialized agency;**

- **strengthening institutional arrangements for integration of the three pillars, possibly through elevation of the Commission on Sustainable Development to a Sustainable Development Council; and**
- **enhancement of civil society participation in decision making and implementation;**

On this note, allow me to make a small comment about the Sustainable Development Council. The strong support from many Member States and civil society is providing momentum for in-depth discussions on this option.

We need a new high profile body to replace the weak Commission on Sustainable Development. We need a body that will attract high level participation and engagement.

More importantly, it should promote integration of the three pillars of sustainable development, implementation of outcomes and institutional coherence.

It should be innovative in its approach, give due space to all major groups and provide an opportunity for all - including the UN system - to share experiences and learn from each other.

Indeed, this is largely a distillation of ideas from Member States and major group stakeholders. The time has come to break the status quo and to work with the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, to create the institutional follow-up that is fit for effective implementation, and empowered to do the job.

4) agreement on measuring progress, which has been one of the principal shortcomings until now. To that end:

- there is keen interest in defining aspirational Sustainable Development Goals that could be agreed at Rio or through a follow-up process, before 2015;**
- there is also interest in finding a good alternative measure of well-being to complement GDP...one that takes into account the environmental and social dimensions, which GDP fails to capture;**

If I may stop here for a moment to focus on SDGs. Both at Rio+20 and in its follow-up, SDGs can provide fresh new momentum for sustainable development.

They should be balanced and relevant to all countries, rich or poor.

While each country will approach SDGs in a way that is consistent with its national circumstances... the SDGs will be key to monitoring progress, rallying support and promoting action.

The current zero draft says that SDGs should encompass priority areas such as oceans, food security and sustainable agriculture, sustainable energy for all, water access and efficiency, sustainable cities, green jobs, decent work and social inclusion, and disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Sustainable consumption and production should also be included.

My appeal to you is this: Be ambitious! Take action! Ask your negotiators to go beyond just acknowledging the need for SDGs.

Work for an agreement, at least for the present, on the critical areas. Guide the process more substantively for the post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

Which brings me to the fifth and last point I want to highlight.

5) There are also a number of areas, around which concrete actions or the launch of processes are proposed. These include:

- **a framework agreement on corporate social responsibility reporting, for large public corporations;**
- **support to the goals articulated by the Secretary-General's initiative on sustainable energy for all;**
- **a process to negotiate an agreement on protection of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction;**
- **support for policies to ensure a social protection floor for society's most vulnerable members;**
- **and launch of a global report on the state of sustainable development.**

Excellencies, there is much in the zero draft for Governments and other stakeholders to ponder, discuss and hopefully agree on.

Of course it could be more ambitious, and I urge you to make it so!

[COHERENCE AMONG MINISTRIES]

Specifically, I'll make a very concrete appeal to all of you today.

The success of Rio+20 is, to a large degree, in your hands. You are the main advocates for sustainable development in your Governments.

Sustainable development should, and must be, a shared agenda – for economic ministries, social development ministries, labour ministries, energy ministries, agriculture ministries, all ministries.

In many countries, this coherence is lacking. Yet, a successful Rio+20 requires that all ministries own this agenda.

A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication is one of the two themes of the Conference.

Who is going to build a green economy, promote green growth? The Environment Ministry on its own? I don't think so.

Your Economic, Finance, Planning and Development Ministers need to join you in this undertaking. They need to be convinced that a green economy makes sense ... that it can contribute to strong and inclusive growth.

If *you* are not convinced, then I don't expect they will be. And if *they* are not convinced, nothing will be done to shift towards more sustainable policies, investments and development paths.

You must be the advocates in your own capitals for stronger actions to align economic, social and environmental goals.

I would humbly make a request of each of you. When you get back to your capitals, meet with your colleagues, the Economic, Planning and Social Ministers, to discuss what is at stake at Rio+20.

In April, some of those same Ministers will converge on Washington, D.C., to attend the spring meetings of the World Bank and IMF. There will be a Rio+20 breakfast at those meetings.

Urge them to attend that breakfast – not just for the good food, but to discuss with their colleagues the significance of Rio+20 for their economics and finance portfolios.

How can decisions taken at Rio+20 make it easier to mainstream sustainable development into economic, fiscal and financial policy making?

If they come away with good answers, then this message may make it to their Heads of State and Government. First, they should come to Rio+20. Second, there are important decisions to be made ... for the health of the environment, yes, but also for the health of whole economies and societies.

These important decisions require the collective resolve of the international community. To succeed, we need international solidarity and cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

[CONCLUSION]

Rio+20 should be a conference to remember. And it will only be so if it is a conference of implementation that delivers a framework and set of concrete actions to advance sustainable development across the globe.

This is the challenge humanity faces. This is the challenge we all face at Rio this June. Let us boldly rise to it.

As the Secretary-General has repeatedly said, Rio+20 is one of the most important conferences in the history of the United Nations. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set our world on a sustainable pathway.

In a way, we are fortunate – fortunate that history offers us an opportunity to make a difference.

Let us seize that opportunity and build a future we all want – a sustainable future that is inclusive, equitable, and anchored on a green economy ... that advances poverty eradication and sustainable development ... and that protects, preserves and conserves our natural heritage.

Thank you.
