Keynote statement

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“Rio+20 resetting the paradigm for regional cooperation on sustainable development”

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me a pleasure to contribute to this high level meeting from UNEP’s perspective as a global organization, but increasingly regional engagement and hopefully also in near future with a subregional presence in Central Asia. I would like to congratulate SPECA on its 15th anniversary and wish it many successes also in the coming years.

One of the key outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference was the agreement by Heads of State and by more than 190 nations that a green economy could be 'an important tool' for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication, particularly when supported by policies that encourage decent employment, social welfare and inclusion, and the maintenance of ecosystems. Green economy is as much about environment as about economy, of course with respect to the social dimension.

Transitioning to a green economy is rising up the political thermometer as governments embark on the Road to Post Rio+20, twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit. As governments, businesses and civil society identify their respective routes, we can all be hopeful because this common goal is truly within our grasp. UNEP is proud to be an important contributor to the debate how to transition to the green economy.

Let us take a moment to look back in Rio, June 2012. Central Asian countries were actively present through their government and civil society delegations in the Rio +20 Summit plenary and side events. We heard the official statements made by the Presidents of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, by the Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan and the Ministers of Environment of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

All Central Asian countries welcomed transitioning to green economy, and that green development be at the core of their long-term sustainable development strategies. Many of you expressed concern over ecosystem and biodiversity losses and climate change impact on glaciers. We heard water referred to as a strategic resource, efficient energy production and the move to renewable energy sources as well as trans-boundary environmental risks as challenges Central Asia would like to embrace together with regional and global bodies.

Kyrgyzstan stressed mountain ecosystems, and called for an international initiative to be launched for countries that are vulnerable to degrading mountain ecosystems.
Kazakhstan called for a long-term strategy on conflict-free energy that is based on unified norms and standards. As their contribution to global efforts, the “Global Energy and Ecological strategy” and the “Green Bridge partnership” were highlighted.

Turkmenistan, which occupies 4th place in the world in terms of natural gas resources, emphasized its requirement to become more efficient in production and use of gas, oil, and in transport. It called for strengthening of the Caspian Sea efforts, and establishment of a special programme for the Aral Sea.

Uzbekistan expressed concern over cross-border pollution, loss of biodiversity, Aral Sea problems and worsening of water resources. It embraced development of renewable energy sources and modernization of the economy. Water being the backbone for food security and agriculture, IWRM and especially regional cooperation on water resources were highlighted as key issues for Central Asia.

Tajikistan expressed its hope that the key activities of 2013’s "International Year of Water Cooperation" will help to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation at all levels, the achievement of the internationally agreed goals on water and sanitation, as well as the conservation of water resources for future generations.

Coming back to today, we can observe that many concrete steps have been undertaken by the countries to implement Rio+20 conclusions. Kazakhstan has adopted its Green Economy Concept in May 2013 and Dushanbe, Tajikistan has hosted the successful water conference in August, to name just two examples.

Overall, Central Asia countries put forward an unanimous appeal inviting UN bodies and their specific programmes to help further elaborate and implement their plans towards green sustainable development based on best practices, and national, regional and global cooperation mechanisms.

One concrete example of this collaboration, which was shared with us yesterday at the informal meeting of the Interstate Committee on Sustainable Development of Central Asia, are the plans to strengthen the institutional and legal framework for regional cooperation in fulfilling the commitments made at the Rio+20 Summit by the governments of Central Asia.

I was encouraged to see key areas well covered such as: optimizing interaction within ICSD and its organs as well as with IFAS structures; strengthening ICSD in line with the IFAS mandate; updating and upgrading the Regional Environment Action Plan; activating ratification of the Ashgabat Convention; identifying regional priorities for Central Asia’s transition to a green economy and other highly topical issues.

We at UNEP, together with our colleagues from UNECE, have supported the ICSD’s efforts so far and will continue to do so.
Another baby that was delivered in Rio+20 was the mandate for a strengthened and upgraded UNEP and many concrete steps have been undertaken by UNEP to materialize the Rio decision. The universal membership of the UNEP’s governing body has led to the establishment of the United Nations Environmental Assembly of UNEP, which will have its first session on 23-27 June 2014, assembling ministers of environment of the world, as well as other partners. I can already reveal that topics for this historic session will include the transition to green economy as well as defining of the post-2015 UN development agenda. The voices of the Central Asian countries and their priorities should be heard also at this global platform and I would therefore want to extend to all of you an invitation to participate in the first UNEA session next year.

Thank you for your attention.