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United Nations Development Account Project
Developing the Capacities of the Arab Countries for Climate Change Adaptation by Applying
Integrated Water Resources Management Tools

Workshop on Climate Change Adaptation in the Economic Development Sector Using
Integrated Water Resources Management Tools
Amman, 25-27 May 2016

Opening Statement

delivered by

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Distinguished Director Generals, Directors, Deputy Directors and Officers in Arab States,
Esteemed experts and members of the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management
Network (AWARENET),
Fellow colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Director of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division, Ms. Roula Majdalani, I am pleased to welcome you to this "Workshop on Climate Change Adaptation in the Economic Development Sector Using Integrated Water Resources Management Tools."

The workshop is conducted within the framework of the United Nations Development Account project entitled "Developing the Capacities of the Arab Countries for Climate Change Adaptation by Applying Integrated Water Resources Management Tools." The project is coordinated by ESCWA and implemented in partnership with the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) of the League of Arab States, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Western Asia (UNEP/ROWA), and the World Health Organization Centre for Environmental Health Action (WHO/CEHA). The project aims to develop region-specific training materials on climate change adaptation in five key sectors, namely the environment, agriculture, health, human settlements and economic development.

The United Nations Development Account was established to support capacity building in member States on key and emerging issues. The global community has repeatedly recognized the need to combat climate change as a core component of sustainable development. This was most recently articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by the global community in September 2015, and in the Paris Agreement that emerged from the inter-governmental negotiations undertaken by the 21st Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2015.

Distinguished officials and experts,

Economic development challenges and opportunities related to climate change at the global level have been traditionally addressed from a climate change mitigation perspective. Heated debates have taken place on how and if the global community can consolidate efforts to limit the increase in the global average temperature to 2°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of this century, with the Paris Agreement articulating the ambition of limiting the rise in temperature to only 1.5°C. Achieving this goal requires a transformative global agenda that is premised on green growth constructs and low to no fossil fuel economies. The greatest consumers of fossil fuels and emitters of greenhouse gases will need to demonstrate and prove their leadership in meeting their commitments if the global community is to achieve this common goal.

Arab States have a place in this agenda, and have already included in national and sectoral development strategies and in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) efforts to reduce emissions, pursue renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, and be part of global mitigation efforts. Most Arab States have also committed to do more if sufficient financing, appropriate technologies and effective capacity building is provided.

However, as the world seeks to limit the average temperature of Mother Earth to under 2°C by the end of this century, the Arab Region is already experiencing temperature increases of well beyond that. Furthermore, projections for the Arab Domain show that the region will experience a general increase in temperature of 0.3 to 3.4°C when considering moderate and pessimistic emission scenarios by the middle of this century. Additionally, an increase in temperature of 2 to 5°C may be experienced across the Arab region by the end of the century. These increases are relative to the temperatures recorded in the Arab region from 1986-2005, which is nearly a century after the pre-industrial period and already takes into consideration temperature increases since that time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

So what does this mean?

It means that the Arab Region is already suffering the impacts of climate change caused by unsustainable production and consumption patterns in Developed Countries that have spanned for more than a century.

It means that Arab States are already suffering the legacy of climate change, including the violent effects of climate variability and extreme weather events, such as flash floods, devastating droughts and dust storms that bring trade, transport and tourism to a halt.

It means that Arab States should not only contribute to global efforts to reduce emissions, but also commit themselves to adapt to climate change that is already underway and impacting our economic development today.

It also means that we need to assess the impact of climate change and understand the vulnerability of the Arab region to climate change so that we can effectively plan and prepare for the future. And to do this, in our water-scarce region, we need to consider water resource and water services as a key entry point for pursuing adaptation.

Esteemed experts.

The five training modules under preparation within this United Nations Development Account project aim to build regional capacity for climate change adaptation. In doing so, they draw upon the methodologies and findings generated under the “Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region” (RICCAR), which is a United Nations-League of Arab States effort that is coordinated by ESCWA and implemented in cooperation with over a dozen organizations. This capacity building project on climate change adaptation thus benefits from the regional climate modeling, hydrological modeling and vulnerability assessment tools developed under RICCAR for informing climate change policy in the Arab region.

This workshop thus aims to build the capacity of Arab States to consider the effects of climate change on economic development, with special emphasis placed on integrated assessment and management tools and economic instruments. To do so, we aim to foster interactive discussions on how climate change assessment, integrated water resource management, economic instruments and enabling environments for finance and investment can support Arab State pursue climate change adaptation.

Dear colleagues,

In closing, I would like to thank the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for kindly hosting us here in Amman. I would also like to thank the distinguished decision-makers and experts gathered here today for their participation and contributions to this workshop and to the finalization of the training manual. Thanks are also extended to my ESCWA colleagues for their extensive efforts in preparing for this regional workshop. I wish you fruitful discussions and a pleasant stay in Jordan.

Thank you.