

OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF MR. SHA ZUKANG, USG, DESA
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MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE AFRICAN REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR RIO+20

ADDIS ABABA, 24 OCTOBER 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour and pleasure for me to address this African Preparatory meeting on Rio+20 on behalf of Secretary-General of the Conference Mr. Sha Zhukang, and the Rio+20 Secretariat which I head. I express my gratitude to ECA, especially to its Executive Secretary, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, for making this possible.
2. The Rio+20 Conference has one primary objective- to renew political commitment. It has been tasked to do this through an analysis of the progress and gaps in implementing existing commitments, and addressing new and emerging challenges. It has been asked by the UN General Assembly to focus on two themes – a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.
3. Our meeting today is another milestone on the road to Rio+20. It has been preceded by regional meetings in Santiago, Cairo and Seoul. Meetings on themes related to the Conference have also been held in Solo, Beijing, New Delhi, Warsaw, Oslo, and Copenhagen. Meetings are also planned to be held in Geneva, Bonn, Monaco and San Francisco, and this is not a complete listing. All these preparatory meetings, including the Prepcoms and intersessionals at the global level have served multiple purposes. They have deepened understanding of the key issues involved; revealed different approaches to the same goal; heightened appreciation of the challenges involved in the path to sustainable development; and helped formulate inputs for the compilation document.
4. Nowhere are the themes and objective of the Conference more relevant than in Africa. Peace, eradication of poverty and sustainable development are overarching priorities of Africa. Rio+20 offers a great opportunity to address African challenges and it is imperative that Africa remains actively engaged in the Rio+20 process to ensure that its needs and challenges are central to the discussions.
5. Africa today faces intertwined economic, social and environmental challenge. It is disproportionately affected by climate change. Issues such as water scarcity, lack of access to energy and food security assume particularly threatening dimensions. At the same time, many countries in Africa are uniquely placed in their development path which may allow them to make the necessary changes to make the path to sustainable development faster and easier.

6. What then should Rio+20 mean for Africa?

- First, it should lead to economic dynamism and stability; promote social protection and inclusion and create jobs especially for the youth; and protect the natural resource base on which the future of our planet depends. It should in short, **Integrate** the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.
- Second, it should lead to a more energized **implementation** of the sustainable development agenda- which has been one of the major gaps over the past 20 years.
- Third, it should lead to **coherent** policies and programmes at all levels.

Thus, the three magical words for Rio+20 are integration, implementation and coherence.

7. The other meetings in preparation for Rio+20 have helped in a better understanding of expectations and let me share some of these with you today. The first of the two themes for Rio+20, the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, has generated considerable debate, with many interests and concerns being expressed. We are still some way from reaching a common understanding on the meaning, scope and implications of a green economy. It means different things to different countries. Some suggest that Rio+20 must clarify what it is not, and through this process it will become clear as to what it is. There seems to be an emerging consensus as to **what it is not**:

IT IS NOT

- A top down, one size fits all approach to development;
- An excuse for green protectionism in trade;
- A pretext for green conditionality in aid and finance;
- A way to put nature under corporate control; and
- A model of tinkering at the margins of “business as usual”.

IT COULD BE

- Based on a set of guiding principles drawn from Rio 1992, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibility;
- A means to accelerate progress towards sustainable development and poverty eradication;
- A way to re-orient public and private decision making so that it reflects and respects natural capital;
- A way to synergize growth and environmental protection by promoting win-win solutions;

- A way to include the poor as the main beneficiaries and active participants in building such a green economy.

8. One of the more interesting ideas, which owes its origin to the European Union is to have a green economy roadmap which would be a pathway to sustainable development. While details are still being worked out, including calibrating the roadmap to different national contexts, this roadmap with clear goals, timelines and monitoring mechanisms could potentially be a useful product of Rio+20.

9. Linked to the idea of goals is the continuing interest in the idea of **sustainable development goals (SDGs)**, which will help assess progress on the road to sustainable development. These proposed goals will obviously need to be balanced, complement the MDGs and be integrated with the current discussions on the post 2015 development agenda.

10. Thus, as we go forward we need to reflect on the proposals for a green economy roadmap and the SDGs, so as to have a differentiated approach, making them useful to national policy makers for stocktaking and policy making at the national, regional and global levels. Also being proposed as part of the roadmap is a toolkit of good practices and lessons learned, and a process for assessing progress on sustainable development. We look forward to your invaluable inputs to this emerging stream of thought.

11. As the preparations for Rio+20 gain momentum, I would like to mention a tentative list of 7 priority areas or new and emerging issues, identified by Member States so far. These include:

- Combating poverty, including through green jobs and promoting social inclusion;
- Advancing food security and sustainable agriculture;
- Sound water management;
- Energy access including from renewable sources, as well as efficiency and sustainability;
- Sustainable human settlements;
- Management of oceans; and
- Improving resilience and disaster preparedness.

You will see these issues mirrored to a great extent in Africa, and would figure as part of your discussions today. I look forward to your reflections on these priority areas, as these serve to focus discussions on concrete deliverables at Rio+20.

12. I would now like to focus on the issue of energy access which continues to be accorded the highest priority in all the regions. In this context, and you may be aware, the SG has launched the initiative on sustainable energy for all, covering the areas of energy access, energy efficiency and renewable energy. There is an agreement that universal access to sustainable energy could be made a reality by 2030 - provided new business models are devised, incentives provided to the private sector,

and proper policies and institutions put in place. Thus, Rio+20 offers us a platform for endorsing a universal access goal, and provide a clear roadmap to mobilize resources and implemented measures to achieve it.

13. Let me now turn to the second theme for Rio+20- the institutional framework for sustainable development and refer back to the three magical words- integration, implementation and coherence. All the analysis and examination of the existing institutional framework points to deficits related to these three areas. The three pillars are not integrated in an institutional setting, the focus on implementation of commitments is weak, and there is a lack of coherence on among bodies, entities and institutions at all levels. We must approach institutional reform through the prism of such an analysis.

14. Many views have emerged:

- At the global level there is a clear expression of interest in strengthening UNEP and probably considering its elevation to a specialized agency. But within this broad expression, more detail is being sought on the implications and impact;
- There is also a deep interest in the creation of a Sustainable Development Council along with ideas on strengthening the CSD and ECOSOC. The model of the Human Rights Council is often cited;
- At the regional level, ways to strengthen the Regional Commissions, and improve the interface with regional development banks, regional integration entities and other bodies is also a major preoccupation;
- At the national level, many are referring to the need to reorient national decision making, putting integration at the heart of national system of ministries, activating SDCs at national level, and giving a more participatory role to national stakeholders;
- The UN system is being asked to strengthen its contribution to all levels especially at the country level, increasingly using the "delivering as one" modality.

15. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen, I leave you with some final thoughts-

First, Rio+20 must succeed, failure is not an option. The challenges we face are too urgent, and we cannot let this window of opportunity close.

Rio+20 is a sustainable development conference, and all parts of government and civil society have a stake in it, and should feel a sense of ownership in the deliberations and outcome.

The outcome must be people-centered and inclusive, taking into account the needs of the most vulnerable.

The ambitions of the actions agreed at Rio+20 must match the scale of the challenges we face. Half measures will not do.

Financing, science and technology, and capacity building will be critical to a successful outcome. I note that this is particularly important for Africa. Despite current difficulties and economic uncertainties, we must find a way for Rio+20 to deliver on the means of implementation for African countries to green their economies.

Equally important will be issues such as gender empowerment, education, and putting science at the service of sustainability.

16. The whole UNCSD secretariat stands ready to support you in every way.

Let me take this opportunity to remind you to make your individual contributions to the compilation document by 1 November 2011. The outcome of this meeting will serve as the regional input into the compilation document reflecting the vision of Africa for Rio+20.

Let me conclude with the words of the Secretary-General at the opening of the general debate of the 66th session of the General Assembly. He said –

“Saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth.....these are one and the same fight. We must connect the dots between climate change, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security and women’s empowerment. Solutions to one problem must be solutions to all. Rio+20 must succeed.”

I thank you and wish you successful deliberations.
