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For Session I of the First Arab States Regional High Level Forum of Directors-General for Development Cooperation on: Intra-Regional South-South Cooperation as a Driver for Effective Policy Coordination and Development Coordination in the Arab States region

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Distinguished Panel Members, excellences, dignitaries, UN colleagues, and, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to join you here at the First Arab South-South Development Expo and to be part of this high level discussion.

UNEP was honoured to have been the host of the most recent Global South-South Development Expo in October last year. It was convened at our Headquarters, in Nairobi, Kenya, and it was the first time the Expo has taken place in the South. It seems we are yet again achieving a number of firsts, with this the first Arab Regional South-South Development Expo.

As the Special Adviser to the Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner on South-South Cooperation, it is an honour for me to be able to share with you the UNEP vision, building from its experiences, and to hopefully add some food for thought in the discussion we will have here this morning concerning how intra-regional cooperation can benefit effective policy and development coordination.

Today, we are facing many common challenges – economic, social and environmental. And in many areas: climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, to name a few. Unfortunately, many of these challenges affect the world’s poorest countries in the South the most. Yet, some of the most extraordinary sustainable solutions to these challenges are coming from the South. Through South-South cooperation, UNEP aims at catalysing and accelerating transformative changes towards green economy and environmental sustainability along the course of development.

It is widely recognized that countries of the South have an opportunity to leapfrog the old development patterns that are often high in environmental costs, embracing the latest clean technologies and best practices that already exist, and avoiding investments in carbon-intensive infrastructures and wasteful production. The core spirit of South-South cooperation in UNEP is to enable and empower more developing countries to play a more proactive role in these transformative changes.

That is clearly happening. It is estimated that Southern trade now accounts for 47 per cent of the global trade, with South-South trade making up at least half of this total. As such, there is a huge opportunity for these developing countries to benefit from new greener market technologies and production processes, which can lead to the export of high value goods and services.

At UNEP we have been focussing on supporting countries in their transition to a Green Economy, and this was the theme of the recent Global Expo in Nairobi. Similarly, the overarching themes of this First Arab South-South Development Expo are Youth and Women’s Employment, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency and Food and Water Security, represent many aspects of green economy approaches, complementing and allowing us to build on the discussions we had in Nairobi.
Another area where we can build on the experiences in Nairobi’s Expo in Kenya was the convening of the Partnership Forum, which expanded the function of the Expo from showcasing solutions to partnership building and matchmaking. Providing such a platform saw over US$450 million pledged between investors, green business, governments and other parties, with examples coming from this region, such as green businesses for women in Egypt and solar water heating in Tunisia. The expansion of the Partnership for Action in Green Economy (PAGE) through the opportunity provided by the GSSD Expo is another evidence of the positive response from developing countries to the green economy notion translated in the language of south-south cooperation.

The South-South Energy Initiative Partnership was one of these Partnership Forums, with natural interest for this region. With the bulk of oil and gas discoveries occurring in the global South, governments have the opportunity to capitalise on the role that oil and gas can play in the transition to a Green Economy and more sustainable energy systems.

There are indeed a plethora of lessons to be learned from the South to invest wisely, implement energy mix policies that allow for non-renewable resources to address energy challenges while simultaneously developing more sustainable energy solutions. These need to be shared and replicated. The existing and developing Pan-Arab electricity networks might provide a mechanism, building on the existing cooperation amongst countries in the region to move towards a goal of sustainable energy for all through intra-regional cooperation.

It has been wonderful to see a continuation of the partnerships approach here, with the presentation and active participation of SS Gate and the drive to have representatives of government, private sector, research institutions and civil society with us in Doha, ensuring that all that actors are fully engaged, emphasising that the way to ensure effective cooperation for policy and development coordination is to ensure that partners are empowered, discussions are engaging and interactive and that there is a focus on the results to be achieved. The UN system has a strong role to play in this in terms of its convening power amongst stakeholders.

In terms of tools to enhance intra-region cooperation, what better way than to start with education, surely a transformative agent in sustainable development? This region can be seen as a home of academia, with world renowned seats of learning dating back centuries. Wise decision-making depends on an ever-growing pool of often unavailable data and information, and the people with the knowledge and understanding of how to use it.

Awareness and education precede responsible decisions, policy making and actions. It is for this reason that UNEP is working with the Eye on Environmental Education Special Initiative in the promotion of its Global Partnership on Environment and Sustainability, UNEP’s flagship programme on environmental education in higher education. One of the key deliverables of this partnership in the coming 18 months is to mainstream environmental education in the Arab Region. This will be achieved through the creation of the Arab States Green Universities Network, focusing on curriculum innovations, local carbon campuses and targeted training programmes. Such knowledge sharing is a good way forward. We have seen how active youth in the region are through the interventions made in all our discussions this week. Let us continue to engage and support them as we look to the enhancement of intra-regional cooperation.

Looking beyond education; Science, Technology and Innovation is also a rapidly growing field, with recognition of the need to invest in people and develop policy to further its aims. The recently launched
“Atlas of Islamic-World Science and Innovation” showcases efforts made in Jordan. Her Royal Highness Princess Sumaya remarked on its launch the need for Arab cooperation among governments, academia and industry to create the necessary environment for innovation to flourish.

The past 2 days has been extremely rich in showcasing a range of innovative Southern solutions that are contributing to building Green Economies, reducing poverty and creating jobs. The sustainability of environment, ecosystems and natural capacity is at the core of every country’s national interest. In view of the growing South-South cooperation and increasingly complex exchanges, there is a need to provide sufficient tools and technical support to decision-makers and cooperation practitioners in developing countries, in order to safeguard their environmental sustainability alongside economic interest. UNEP is committed to working with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and sister UN agencies in unlocking the untapped potential of these Southern-grown solutions as we move towards a global transition to an inclusive, low-carbon society, already accepted as the only real path to sustainable development.

The Expo here in Doha has demonstrated the strength and variety of “Arab-grown” solutions to this end. The commitment to intra-regional cooperation for policy and development coordination is without doubt and the institutional architecture present in terms of multi-stakeholder platforms, funds, foundations and research organisations and committed governments. UNEP will continue its support of this process, facilitating where possible such exchange in the hope of reaching new frontiers – green frontiers – which will deliver sustainable development and poverty eradication to build a healthier and more sustainable future by working together.