Special Session: Cross-Regional Knowledge and Experiences Sharing between Europe and the Arab States – Creating Initiatives for the Future

February 20, 2014, Doha, Qatar

Opening remarks

Mr. Mounir Tabet, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Tunisia

Distinguished colleagues,

It is an honour for me to be opening today the Special Session dedicated to cross-regional knowledge and experiences sharing between Europe and the Arab States organized jointly by the Regional Bureau of the United Nations Development Programme for Europe and CIS and the UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States. On behalf of UNDP let me welcome all of you and express our appreciation to you for accepting our invitation to participate in this session and for your willingness to undertake lengthy journeys from your respective countries. Welcome to Doha.

Allow me also to thank our generous host, the State of Qatar, and the organizers of the first Arab States Regional South-South Development Expo representing both UNDP and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation who have made this special event possible.

Today’s special session will cover wide thematic areas related to transitions, such as institutional reform and governance, women empowerment, youth participation, and other critical social and environmental issues. We aim for it to be an opportunity to learn about the experiences that highlight the complexity of past transitions in Europe and ongoing transitions in the Arab States, to present a case for increased knowledge sharing and to create an opportunity to forge new partnerships.

For decades, UNDP have been privileged to serve in the two regions. This allowed us to build a strong knowledge base on the political, social and economic environments and on actions that lead to their improvement. The partnerships that we have built in the two regions have allowed us to collaborate closely with
numerous national stakeholders, including national and local governments, civil society, academia and the private sector. Our presence in 22 Countries in Europe and CIS and 18 Countries in the Arab States provides us a unique opportunity to support knowledge sharing and sustain the link between Arab and European experiences and know-how.

As the Arab spring unfolded and new governments came into power in several Arab countries, it was only natural that we witnessed an increased level of interest in cross-regional exchanges between countries of Europe and the Arab States. A number of European countries that had gone through their own transitions generously shared their experiences and knowledge in the sensitive and complex subject of political transitions. Many of them included in their priorities support related to social, economic and political transitions especially to countries undergoing transitions in the Arab region, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, among others.

In spite of the considerable differences between the two regions and in spite of the often unpredictable pathways that transitions follow, Europe and the Arab States share a number of aspects of political and institutional transformation as well as broader challenges related to the empowerment of the populations and environmental sustainability. The nature of these challenges calls for sharing and co-developing of practical solutions through collaboration across regions. The exchanges of knowledge, skills and expertise between Europe and the Arab States in this regard have a higher potential of impact than single-country or single-region initiatives.

It is our hope that our consultations today will build on our ongoing partnership and will represent a new milestone to renew this partnership, identify new areas of cooperation or deepen those that are ongoing. Innovation, creativity, in-time, evidence-based and custom-fit solutions as well as co-creation and complementarity can indeed be our guiding principles.

With this in mind, I wish you all fruitful substantive discussions and Working Group sessions.

Thank you!