United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 20-22 June, 2012*

CONCEPT NOTE

**Regional Commissions Joint Side Event**

“**Green Economy in the context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development: Challenges and Opportunities at the regional level”**

Date: 21 June 2012

Time: 15:00 – 16:30

Venue: Rio Centro Convention Centre, Room T2

**Expected outcomes**:

a) Highlighting the added value of regional approaches for promoting a green economy in the context of poverty eradication through an effective integration of the pillars of sustainable development;

b) Sharing of concrete examples of good practices and public policies in key areas at the regional level, which effectively promote green economy through integrating the three pillars of sustainable development (SD);

b) A better understanding of the role of a strong Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) at the regional level for promoting a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and SD;

c) An enhanced understanding of the role of the Regional Commissions as a unique regional platform for the promotion of green approaches as part of an inclusive and sustainable development agenda in their respective regions.

**Panellists and discussants**:

The event will feature keynote remarks by a number of Heads of State and the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions and an interactive Q&A session with the floor.

**Background**:

The importance of integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars of SD has been long recognized as critical to achieving a balanced development agenda, including at the UNCED in 1992. However, the implementation of the concept in practice has proved to be challenging. Notwithstanding, there are some examples of good practices in implementing public policies and programmes which have successfully promoted a green economy in key areas through adopting an integrated approach to sustainable development.

The multidisciplinary expertise and platforms of the Regional Commissions gives them the comparative advantage of promoting a green economy in the context of poverty eradication by linking the economic, social and environmental dimensions in an integrated approach to SD. As part of this side event, the Regional Commissions are focusing on key elements of the green economy which are critical to an inclusive and sustainable development in their regions and highlighting the challenges, opportunities and the enablers for effectively implementing an integrated approach to sustainable development, including the existence of a strong IFSD at the regional level.

The side event will focus on the following areas:

**Achieving Food Security while Greening the Agricultural Sector**

Enhancing food security is imperative for achieving sustainable development. This is a priority, in particular for Africa, in view of the prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in the region. Food insecurity in Africa is mainly attributed to an underdeveloped agriculture sector, coupled with unsustainable management of land resources, the dominance of low income levels, as well as climate variability and change. Capacity-development, knowledge and technology transfer are essential for improving food security and enhancing sustainability. Indeed, there is growing evidence for the positive effects of sustainable farming on production and food security, and there is already a series of successful experiences of the adoption of sustainable farming practices across the continent. The adoption and operationalization of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) of NEPAD represents a significant step towards achieving the MDG on reducing hunger, while at the same time contributing to achieving its twin goal of poverty reduction. Furthermore, CAADP already incorporates a range of instruments and measures for enhancing the green credentials of African agriculture. CAADP provides a framework for addressing food security concerns as a critical element of a green economy in an integrated manner. For example, in addition to promoting sustainable land and water management in a changing climate, it addresses bottlenecks related to structural transformation of the agriculture and rural sectors, infrastructure development, market access and intra-African trade, which would impact positively on the environment, economic growth, employment creation, food security and the nutrition and health status of Africans. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will highlight its efforts towards supporting Africa’s food security aspirations in general and in particular the effective operationalization of CAADP. The potential role of a regional value chain approach to strengthening the agricultural and rural sectors while at the same time fostering the adoption of green agricultural practices will also be illustrated, drawing on concrete examples and success stories from the region.

**Economic system change for implementing a green economy**

The key challenge faced, in particular by developing economies, is in reconciling objectives of achieving rapid economic growth and eradicating poverty without incurring further economic risks, ecological scarcity and social disparities. “Business as usual” is no longer possible - there is an urgent need to transform economic models so address resource constraints and the climate crisis. The transition to a “green economy” will not happen if left to market factors alone, but will need government leadership. The Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will focus on the importance of economic system change for a “win-win” synergy between “green considerations" and the "economy" by highlighting policies that promote the eco-efficiency of economic growth and reduce the pressure on the natural resource base, while continuing to meet human needs. It will highlight the role of ESCAP in catalysing green growth initiatives as a basis for inclusive and sustainable development. Recent reports from the region and a key policy initiative - a low carbon green growth roadmap will be highlighted.

**Environmental democracy as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development**

The rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice are essential to achieving sustainable development, in particular for such important aspects as effective governance and greening the economy. Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration highlights the centrality of such rights, and some regions have made more progress in this regard than others. The Rio+20 Conference provides an opportunity for countries to reiterate their commitment taken 20 years ago and to further a universal application of Principle 10 through concrete instruments and actions. The ECE region, which embraces both the world's richest economies and countries with economies in transition, has made progress in this regard through a number of legal and policy instruments.

These are the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) with its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR). Especially the Aarhus Convention has been acknowledged as the most ambitious venture in environmental democracy undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations.

In this context, UNECE will focus on sharing its experiences with countries in other regions, which may wish to join the instruments or replicate their achievements or be inspired by them. The event will specifically highlight effective models for keeping governments accountable and for ensuring public input in defining and implementing green economy programmes, and in choosing the most appropriate road maps to sustainability. It will thereby provide an opportunity to demonstrate concrete practical efforts of putting Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration into practice.

**Natural resource governance to support green growth as a tool for sustainable development**

The Latin America and Caribbean region has a wealth of natural resources and rich biodiversity; assets that historically have played key roles in the development path of the region, but which countries have struggled to translate into maximized gains that contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable development path. Governance of finite natural resources (including the extraction of hydrocarbons and the mining sector) includes regulatory frameworks, institutional innovation, formulation and implementation of public policy and planning that governments need to implement in order to optimize the equity and social benefits from the exploitation of these resources. Challenges posed by finite natural resource governance include: developing mechanisms to ensure efficient investment of increasing natural resource rents through targeted long-term investment in education, health, infrastructure, innovation and technological development; improving governance of socio-environmental conflicts that arise in the development of the sectors of natural resources; increasing coordination within the region to make adjustments in fiscal policy; as well as increased State participation and management of dilemmas in political economy, public investment toward green growth, among others. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will focus on the outcomes of its work with member States in developing and analyzing public policy, institutional frameworks, regional coordination and regulations faced by finite natural resource-exporting countries in the appropriation and effective use of income in order to achieve green growth that enables a more inclusive and sustainable development path.

***Youth Employment in Emerging Green Sectors***

In most of the developing regions, financial and economic constraints have led to job losses and subsequent increase of poverty levels and in particular among younger generations. This is the case in the Arab Region, characterized by rapidly growing young populations where the region recently witnessed “The Arab Spring”. The Arab Spring, characterized among others by social unrest and political debates, have opened up the discussion about a possible change of the socio-economic development paradigm identifying the Green Economy as one possible option for addressing sustainable development. A Green Economy, if appropriately adopted/adapted as a policy option in the region, represents a good opportunity for job creation in green sectors, including sustainable industries and agriculture. The special role of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has to be recognized in engaging emerging green sectors as they are often the main source of employment and have the potential to fit well in the new green value chains and network of green industries, as well as in agro-food and organic agriculture applications. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) will highlight its cooperation with regional civil society organizations and other regional institutions for the development of the Green Industries and the introduction of a socially sustainable Green Economy, as an example of the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development in the Region.