STATEMENT TO THE

ARAB REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

By

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Your Excellency, Mr. Sadok El Amri, Secretary of State for Environment, Tunisia, Madam Shahira Wahbi, Chief of Sustainable Development and International Environmental Cooperation, Environment, Housing, Water Resources and Sustainable Development Department at the League of Arab States; Madam Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division, ESCWA, Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I am here today to welcome you to Tunisia and to the Arab Regional Consultation on the Sustainable Development Goals, on behalf of Mr. Iyad Abumoghli, the Regional Director and Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme in West Asia and the overall coordinator of UNEP’s work in the Arab region. I would like to thank our hosts, the Government of Tunisia for their excellent work in supporting this meeting and for having us in their wonderful country.

This meeting takes place at a time when the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs), established by the Secretary General, are embarking on their second set of meetings to discuss the various themes that might form the development goals that will shape the Post-2015 era.

The overall consensus remains that the SDGs must build on the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals and set a clear goal for poverty eradication. With the region represented on a rotational basis in the Open Working Group, the messages coming from the region needs to be clear and strong to ensure that they are included. The Regional Implementation Meeting held in Dubai in May began this task, and we are here today to continue upon this journey, to try and
ensure that these universal goals still take account of Arab regional and national diversity.

The other challenge faced is to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals do indeed effectively integrate the three pillars of sustainable development; namely economic development, social development and environmental protection. UNEP, as the environment arm of the UN system, is naturally focussing its efforts on ensuring that environment is fully integrated into the SDGs.

To this end, UNEP has developed a White Paper focussing on “Embedding the Environment in the SDGs”, which has reviewed the MDGs and proposes mechanisms for ensuring environment is fully integrated into the SDGs. Two key conclusions that this paper, reaches are that the new goals need to cover a wider range of important environmental topics than are currently covered under MDG7, and that we need to target the drivers of environmental problems instead of the problems themselves.

So far, the over-riding messages coming from discussions on the environment as part of the SDGs are the human right to a sustainable and clean environment as well as strengthened environmental governance involving all stakeholders. Another strong thread in these discussions is the need to change consumption patterns across the globe and to manage our resources more responsibly and efficiently.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our rich agenda over the coming days provides us with an opportunity to discuss and deliberate on a range of issues that are part of the ongoing discussions for the SDGs and Post-2015 Development Agenda and that
will serve the region as it looks to its contributions to the High Level Political Forum. We have a responsibility to add the voice of the region to the debate on the SDGs, to make sure that the region and its specificities are well considered. The ongoing process is an open and transparent one, and we need to ensure we are all engaged to ensure that the SDGs are relevant to the region, emphasising that all of the global issues apply here; Green Economy, youth unemployment, gender issues, institutional strengthening and engagement of Major Groups and Stakeholders.

Our future needs to build upon saving natural resources for the next generation, and such inter-generational commitments should be at the core of the discussions. I urge each of us, as we consider the topics on our agenda to think not just of ourselves but of our children and the life we would like them to lead and the environment we would like them to enjoy. They have a right to a clean and healthy environment, decent work, a mutually supportive social justice system and not to have to fight for equality.

We have the chance to pave the road for this to happen. It is a big responsibility but it is also our opportunity to be the agents for a sustainable change.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

With this in mind, I wish you a fruitful and productive Regional Consultation on the SDGs and look forward to the outcomes we will achieve.
Thank you once more to the Government of Tunisia for hosting us here for the consultation and I hope everyone will have a chance to enjoy the beautiful scenery and Tunisian hospitality while we are here.

Thank you.