Ms. Muna Barghouth, Distinguished Representative of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA),

Ms. Shahira Wehbi, Distinguished Representative of the League of Arab States (LAS),

Distinguished Delegates from Arab Countries,

Esteemed Experts from the RICCAR Partner Organizations and Contributing Research Institutes,

Dear Representatives from National, Regional and International Organizations,

I am honoured to welcome you to this Fifth Expert Group Meeting of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), which has been held annually since its first inception meeting in October 2009.

As many of you are aware, RICCAR is implemented through a collaborative partnership involving the League of Arab States and its specialized organs, United Nations organizations serving the Arab region, as well as international expert institutions, comprising 11 partner organizations, namely the LAS, ACSAD, ESCWA, FAO, GIZ, SMHI, UNEP, UNESCO, UNISDR, UNU and the WMO. Three renowned research institutes have also joined the initiative by contributing climate change projections to the regional climate modelling ensemble being coordinated for the Arab Domain by SMHI, namely the Climate Service Center in Germany, the Center of Excellence for Climate Change Research (CECCCR) at the King Abdulaziz University in the KSA, and the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) also in the KSA.

Funding for the initiative is provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), as well as through in-kind and financial contributions by the RICCAR Partners and Contributing Research Institutes. Thanks are extended to Sida for funding this meeting, and to the project partners implementing the Sida project that supports this regional initiative, who contributed to this meeting’s organization, namely the LAS, ACSAD, ESCWA, SMHI, UNISDR and the WMO.
This Fifth Expert Group Meeting will review the progress achieved in implementing the Regional Initiative and discuss next steps for finalizing its integrated assessment, which links climate change impact assessment with a socio-economic and environmental vulnerability assessment for the Arab region.

This includes reporting on the findings of the regional climate modelling projections contributing to the ensemble for the Arab Domain, which were produced using different models and scenarios for generating projections up through the year 2100. The meeting will also examine how the regional climate modelling outputs will inform the hydrological modelling component of the integrated assessment at the regional and basin levels to better assess the projected impacts of climate change on freshwater resources in the Arab region.

The meeting will additionally report on the progress achieved by two new working groups established under RICCAR based on the recommendations of the Fourth RICCAR Expert Group Meeting held in July 2012, namely, the Regional Knowledge Hub Working Group and the Vulnerability Assessment Working Group. This will include discussion of the draft terms of reference for the establishment of a regional knowledge hub and the methodological approach being developed for preparing the climate change vulnerability assessment. Thanks is extended to GIZ for supporting these working groups with financial and advisory assistance over this past year under its project, Adaptation to Climate Change in the Water Sector in the MENA Region (ACCWaM).

The EGM will also discuss the development and updating of historical disaster loss databases to support analysis of extreme weather events in selected Arab countries, as well as work being undertaken to support climate data rescue and the digitization of hydro-meteorological records in the Arab region and ways to improve the delivery of climate services to Arab countries.

Distinguished participants,

I would like to take this opportunity to stress on the importance of the inter-governmental and inter-agency collaborative process embedded in RICCAR and its aim to build a regional scientific knowledge base, which engages governments and stakeholders to inform policy dialogue, priority-setting and planning for climate change adaptation in the Arab region.

I am pleased to highlight that this collaboration honours the vision set forth for the 2013 United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation that calls for raising awareness and increasing cooperation on the challenges facing water resources management. It is expected that the outcomes of the RICCAR integrated assessment and the associated capacity built in water, environment, meteorology and agricultural institutions, as well as regional research centers, will help to provide a common baseline of information and greater understanding of the climate change impacts facing our scarce water resources and the associated implications this poses for socio-economic and environmental vulnerability in the Arab region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
I would like to thank again Sida for their continuous support of this regional initiative and extend my gratitude to all the RICCAR Partners and Contributing Research Institutions their fruitful cooperation and their valuable contribution to RICCAR. Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to the representatives from the Arab member countries for their participation in this EGM and for the key role they play in implementing and ensuring follow-up on this important regional initiative.

I wish you a productive meeting and a pleasant stay in Amman.

Thank you.