STATEMENT TO THE
ARAB REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
MEETING
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

By

Dr. Iyad Abumoghli
Director and Regional Representative

Dubai, United Arab Emirates
29 May 2013
Your Excellency, Dr. Rashid Bin Fahad, Minister of Environment and Water,

Your Excellency Ms. Rima Khalaf, Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Mr. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director of Environment, Housing, water Resources and Sustainable Development Department, League of Arab States,

Excellencies, representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders,

Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I am here today to welcome you on behalf of Mr. Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, to Dubai and to the Arab Regional Implementation Meeting.

This meeting takes place at an exciting time. We have had almost a year to digest the outcomes of Rio+20, in its outcome document “The Future We Want”, a series of recommendations were made for adjusting the way we look at sustainable development, including reviewing the global sustainable development architecture and strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme, a recommendation supported by Resolution 213 of the General Assembly in its 67th session.

In addition to the institutional arrangements for sustainable development, Rio+20 also had Green Economy at the heart of its discussions. Despite
numerous calls for a precise definition and some confusion concerning its use at that time, Green Economy is now being embraced across all regions and countries of the world as the tool by which we can achieve sustainable development in a holistic manner providing equal opportunities to all as we strive towards the ultimate goal of poverty eradication. Closely linked with Green Economy is the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the only programme formally adopted at Rio+20 and one which encourages us to focus on how we consume and produce resources and products and reduce waste. UNEP is proud to host the Secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) for which most countries have by now nominated their National Focal Points.

The theme of World Environment Day, which falls next Wednesday, 5 June, is Think. Eat. Save. This theme reflects the shocking amount of food waste that we see from production through to consumption, set against a backdrop of countries where large numbers of the population do not have enough to eat on a daily basis. On average, the world wastes one third of what it produces, while this amount is enough to feed all the hungry women and children on Earth.

Rio+20 also set the stage for the development of Sustainable Development Goals, with an Open Working Group already in place, and which held another meeting just this month. The overall consensus is that the SDGs must build on the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals and set a clear goal for poverty eradication. With the regions represented on a rotational basis in the Open Working Group, the messages coming from the regions need to be clear and
strong to ensure that they are included. That is part of our task this week.

Alongside the Rio processes, our region has also embarked on consultations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, engaging a wide range of stakeholders in the process, through the Arab Development Forum: Voices for Choices at the regional level and in a number of national consultations held in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, to name but a few, with more countries joining the process as it continues. Lebanon has recently launched its website “the Lebanon You Want” building on the global World We Want Platform. There are twitter and facebook campaigns and every effort is being made to engage all Major Groups and Stakeholders, with an emphasis on those that do not always have a voice, the vulnerable and under-represented.

UNEP is naturally focussing on the environmental sustainability theme. So far, the over-riding messages are the human right to a sustainable and clean environment as well as strengthened environmental governance involving all stakeholders, but emphasising that with empowerment comes responsibility. 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. These points have been reported through the outcomes of the Arab Development Forum to the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Post-2015.

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 will form part of the discussions for the SDGs and Post-2015 Development Agenda. We
need to ensure that we convey the voice of the region and its specificities to the global community as they continue their discussions. We need 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.

What will also need to be considered is how we operationalize our commitments? How do we link Green Economy policies to sustainable development strategies? How do we connect in the education systems to provide the future generations with the skills set that they will need, to encourage them to be the innovators and entrepreneurs of the future in a society that focuses on environmental protection, green economy and social justice?

We need to look towards linking a move to knowledge-based economies to the overall development strategies, as exemplified by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and to build on the existing examples of the adoption of principles of sustainable development in the region such as MASDAR, sustainable transport networks, and the pledges made in terms of moving to renewable energy in Saudi Arabia over the next 20 years and committing to a low carbon economy.

Our future needs to build upon saving natural resources for the next generation, such inter-generational commitments are 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 Implementation Meeting and look forward to the outcomes we will achieve.

Thank you.