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**UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative (UNDP-UNEP PEI):
Mainstreaming environmental sustainability into national development processes to
achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues.

Allow me first to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Government and People of United Arab Emirates (UAE) for hosting this gathering in this wonderful and hospitable city of Dubai.

Allow me equally to express on behalf of my Government, the people of Rwanda and indeed on my behalf, the condolences and sadness for the demise of His Royal Highness Sheikh Maktoum.

Mr. President, my speech will focus on the UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative, an integrated programme of support to countries for mainstreaming environment into development processes so that development and poverty reduction are not undermined by environmental degradation but rather improved by the sustainable use of natural resources.

UNEP and UNDP have forged a partnership that combines their poverty and environment activities. In Africa the two agencies are working together in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda, and in addition, UNDP country offices play a key role in the implementation of UNEP's poverty and environment project in Mali and Mauritania.

Mr. President, Rwanda was the first country where UNDP and UNEP jointly developed a poverty and environment project and our experience to date will, I believe, provide valuable lessons on this co-operation in general and for the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan – with Rwanda being one of the Bali Strategic Plan pilot countries.

I would like to highlight that the financial resources for UNEP poverty and environment component are provided by Norway and Belgium, while United Kingdom (UK) and European Commission are major funders of the UNDP poverty and environment component.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, originally, UNDP and UNEP had poverty and environment as separate activities, but later on decided to integrate the two programmes so as to:

- Avoid duplication and improve support to countries,
- Meet donor and country requests for better co-ordination
- Help implement the global MOU between UNDP-UNEP MOU and last, but not least
- Act consistent with UN System reform, including efforts to improve inter-agency co-ordination

These efforts resulted into launching UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative, which was initially announced in January 2005 and finally was more formally launched at the 'Environment for the MDGs' event organised by the Poverty and Environment Partnership at the World Summit in September 2005. The Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Toepfer, and the UNDP Administrator, Kemal Dervis, jointly made the announcement of the Initiative.

Turning now to the situation in Rwanda, the links between poverty and environment can not be over emphasized due to the fact that Rwanda's economy is overwhelmingly dependent on environmental resources such as soil, water and forestry etc. Over 90% of Rwanda's population depends directly on such resources, usually as poor, small-scale farmers. Degradation of wetlands has reduced water storage and hydro-electricity generation such that more expensive fossil fuel generation is required. Environmental degradation is therefore, imposing increasing direct and indirect economic and social costs on millions of poor people mainly attributed to factors such as; massive deforestation, serious erosion, wetlands degradation and cultivation of marginal lands, to mention but few.

Therefore, mainstreaming environmental sustainability into Rwanda's national development processes is of greatest importance. Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to reaffirm the Government of Rwanda's commitment to mainstreaming environmental

sustainability into national development, this is exemplified by the second Rwandan Poverty Reduction Strategy which is now referred to as Economic Development for Poverty Reduction Strategy (EPDRS). This programme has been launched last week and the government has already taken necessary measures to ensure that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed into EPDRS. This commitment is reflected by the inclusion of the Ministry responsible for Lands and Environment, in the steering committee and key technical committees for the preparation of this new strategy.

Mr. President, while the Government commitment is undoubted, there is a substantive technical and capacity building support need from the UN and donors to achieve our goals on environmental mainstreaming.

I am pleased to report that, the two UN agencies (UNDP & UNEP) are working closely with my Government to develop an integrated project.

UNEP Nairobi worked very closely with the UNDP Rwanda office, with active backup from UNDP Energy and Environment, New York to support development of the work programme. In addition, environmental advisors from the UNDP Drylands Centre in Nairobi provided support at key stages of the project's development. The Government leadership is unquestionably critical to successful project development and implementation.

In order to implement the project the following process was developed:

First, Government of Rwanda Task Team was established to develop a work plan and, subsequently, provide overall management for the project. The Task Team is chaired by the Rwandan Environmental Management Authority (REMA), and includes membership of key Ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The involvement of this ministry is critical, as it has the overall responsibility for the preparation of EPDRS and the key planning Ministry. UNEP and UNDP act as a Secretariat to the Task Team, and provided initial funds to assist the Government of Rwanda Task Team to develop the work plan that focuses on integrating environmental sustainability into EPDRS.

Second, after the work plan was developed and approved by the Government of Rwanda Task Team, UNEP and UNDP had to develop separate project documents for internal

approval procedures. However, this took time due to un harmonized UNEP and UNDP procedures of approval. I would like to suggest that these operational procedures be reviewed to suit operational procedures for country projects to ensure success and quick service delivery at the country level.

Third, the project implementation in Rwanda will undergo two phases: Phase I, which is ongoing at the moment, will run until the EDPRS is completed in the beginning of 2007. During this first phase, we are trying to produce concrete evidence that will depict of the importance of the environment for poverty reduction and economic growth. One way of doing this is by assessing the economic and social costs of environmental degradation. In February, we will also conduct a pilot integrated ecosystem assessment using the approach of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to identify links between human development and ecosystems in Rwanda. The information generated under PEI will be used to inform and influence the EDPRS.

Phase II of the project will be developed during Phase I, and it will focus on capacity building for the implementation of EDPRS with regards to environmental mainstreaming and will include concrete activities to mainstream environmental sustainability from the local to the national level.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the course of implementing the UNDP-UNEP poverty and environment initiatives project in Rwanda, some lessons that are relevant not just to this project but also to other similar initiatives including Bali strategic plan could be highlighted as follows:

- Strong commitment, leadership and ownership of the government are vital.
- Strong personal commitment and energetic support from the relevant UN officials is also vital.
- Significant financial resources and technical support to countries is required.
- It is vital that UNEP establishes close working relationships with the relevant Government institutions and the UNDP country office at the very earliest stages of the projects.

- A longer term capacity building programme will be needed to ensure that the benefits of the project are sustained.
- Joint UNDP and UNEP proposals to donors are desirable.
- Improved co-ordination between bilateral donors is increasingly important. The benefits of UNDP and UNEP co-operation demonstrates how much could be achieved if bilateral donor co-ordination was improved.
- UNDP and UNEP have time consuming, separate and at times incompatible operational procedures. This is a significant issue, which needs to be addressed to improve both the speed and the effectiveness of project implementation.

Way Forward/Next Step:

- As indicated earlier, in the case of the Rwanda PEI, the focus of Phase I is on ensuring environmental sustainability is included in the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) and on providing concrete recommendations for Phase II.
- We also hope that successful implementation of Phase I will attract additional support from donors, enabling us to develop and implement the crucial second phase of the project.

Phase II will include developing projects to improve the livelihoods of the poor people through improved use of environmental resources and the development and implementation of a comprehensive capacity building programme.

Success will be measured by the explicit inclusion of environmental sustainability in EDPRS along with concrete actions to increase investment in environmental sustainability, including at the district level.

Then, for UNDP and UNEP, the way forward from my perspective includes learning lessons from the ongoing joint projects to develop best practice on mainstreaming environment into national development processes. This will be very useful for further joint poverty and environment projects, subject to mandates and resources.

In addition, I welcome the plan of the two agencies to work within the UN Development Group to mainstream environmental sustainability in other agencies and UN System processes at the national level, such as the Common Country Assessments and the UN Development Assistance Framework.

UNEP and UNDP also intend to use lessons learnt from their co-operation on Poverty and Environment to develop joint UNEP-UNDP support for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, as a follow-up to the World Summit, which, as we all know, gave strong support to these goals. I think this work will be very important.

In summary, the experience in Rwanda clearly demonstrates that joint UNEP and UNDP projects bring considerable benefits first of all for Governments, but also in terms of effective use of donor funds and also for achieving results at the country level.

In closing, I would like to urge UNDP and UNEP to deepen and broaden their joint co-operation so that increasing numbers of countries benefit from their joint support.

Thank you for your attention.