

Excellencies

Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be present this morning at the start of this unique regional workshop, gathering over 10 countries from the Middle East and North Africa, and addressing climate change as countries of the Arab region vulnerable to its effects.

I would like to join my colleagues this morning in congratulating both Lebanon and the Philippines for their work leading this important Forum and ensuring an extension of these discussions for the Middle East and North Africa region.

In my previous work between UN assignments with the humanitarian research organization, DARA, based in Spain, I actually had the privilege to work on some technical assistance and research assignments in collaboration with the Forum when it was being led by Maldives and Bangladesh back in 2010-2012.

The work of this Forum is really vital because we simply must hear from the countries most affected by this global challenge. If their views and perspectives are not coming out in public debate, in research and policy priorities, then we are almost certainly not meeting the needs of the communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

As we have also seen with so many vulnerable countries, there is a tremendous amount that is being done already to respond to the challenge. But we don't hear enough about that. By spotlighting these efforts and enabling success stories reach more countries is key.

Climate change acts directly to change natural weather patterns, but the effects cascade quickly through many sectors. Scarcity of food and water, loss of coastal areas, disruption to ecosystems, and adverse effects on human health are just some direct threats. The economic sector is neither immune, and impacts to infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, and, through increasing numbers of hot days, the outdoor workplace. The current situation for the region is also expected to deteriorate further: for example, water flow in the Euphrates may decrease by 30% and that of the Jordan River by 80% before the turn of the century.

We will touch on these issues more particularly in the focus sessions of this workshop in the time ahead, but if climate change is affecting economies, if it is affecting agricultural yields, water supplies and food prices, and if it is affecting migration and displacement, among many other issues. Then we must pay this problematic more attention, because it is impossible that it is not also having some influence in the course of security crises and for the stability of states in the region that attracts so much attention and resources from the international system.

In particular, we really need to be attuned to the degree in which climate change can make economic hardships even more difficult. Simply by exacerbating poverty, efforts to diffuse tendencies to extremism that can lead to violence would certainly worsen and complicate factors.

The presence of the various country delegations at this Climate Vulnerable Forum regional meeting really does underscore the desire of these countries to have their perspectives and priorities as a group taken into account in public and policy discourse on climate change. Although this group is not geographically, nor socio-economically homogenous, we believe this very diversity offers opportunities for complementarity and synergies.

Many of you are familiar with our work through our presence in over 170 countries to bring to bear lessons from policy dialogue and on the ground interventions to inform strategic positions formulated and adopted at global, regional and national levels. In particular, we are assisting countries to implement climate change activities on adaptation and mitigation, and we are embarking on various programmes that encompass low emission and climate resilient development strategies across the globe –our activities in this area exceed 1.3 billion US dollars over the last few years.

In Lebanon, we are partnering with the Government to follow-through on its political commitment to build a climate resilient economy. UNDP has also been supporting in all aspects of the national process towards establishing a national Low Emission Development strategy. We have also been privileged to support a number of key sectors, to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency, enhance climate information and early warning systems, protect biodiversity, promote green and sustainable cities and promote sustainable land use, as well as to promote resilience to climate change at all levels.

Here in Geneva, UNDP is engaged above all in its capacity of assistance and facilitation to South-South activities of the Climate Vulnerable Forum. Since 2013, UNDP hosts a global support project and this and the other regional meetings of the Forum are all benefitting from organizational and technical support from our headquarters, regional centres and country offices.

We cannot do this work without the support of our partners, and the work of the Forum carried out by UNDP has been funded both by the Climate Vulnerable Forum's own Trust Fund. This is a UNDP-administered financing mechanism that has pooled Forum member and donor contributions. But I would like to also acknowledge particularly here today the support of Germany who has shown its great commitment to seeing advancements in the climate domain by generously supporting key activities of this Forum, including enabling this event to take place.

Distinguished Participants,

This workshop will provides an opportunity to go beyond regional cooperation and opens the door for global South-South collaboration for countries from the Middle East and North Africa region. And it can also contribute to regional efforts, such as the Arab Declaration on Climate Change (back in 2007) call for an increased understanding of climate change impacts. It is our hope that the activity will facilitate learning from the experiences already gained in the region in addressing climate change, and by enabling the countries to tap into the ingenuity of its people, and innovations and best practices available across the Arab world.

2015 is a critical year for international reflection and policy making in the climate realm. Alongside the SDGs and MDGs, the Paris conference on climate change this year in France, commonly referred to as

COP21, is expected to determine the post-2015 international parameters for the global climate agenda. All of these international processes will have a role in shaping the future of the Arab region and indeed the rest of the world.

The coming two days gives us the opportunity to ensure that the Arab region's voice comes through in new channels into the next rounds of the climate negotiations and for shaping collective orientations in the run-up to and after the Paris conference ahead of us, or COP21.

UNDP is firmly committed to continue to support you to play this important role so that country priorities are firmly articulated in the global response to address vulnerabilities to climate change and to help our partners in pursuing low-carbon development.

I wish you a fruitful two days of discussions. I thank you once again for joining the MENA CVF workshop and contributing to its success. I would also like to extend my thanks to the global CVF team, the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to Geneva, as well as the Lebanese Ministry of Environment for making this workshop happen and on such short notice.

Thank you.