

Third National Forum on Climate Change
5 November 2013, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

WELCOME REMARKS – DAY I

by Ms. Claire Van der Vaeren, United Nations Resident Coordinator

H.E Khieu Muth, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment

Excellencies;

Development Partners;

Other honorable guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf the United Nations country team, it is my privilege to welcome you to this session of the Third National Forum on Climate Change.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the National Climate Change Committee for their leadership in organising this important event. The launch of the *Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan* by Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, marks an important milestone and attests to the strong commitment of the Government to address the impacts of climate change.

The recent release of the *Fifth Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* concludes that, **global warming over the past fifty years was dominantly caused by human activities**. Rainfall and temperature patterns will continue to change in the coming decades, threatening efforts to eradicate poverty. Climate-induced natural disasters triggered by extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, are already more frequent and more intense. It is expected this trend will continue posing a significant challenge to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustaining their gains.

Cambodia is consistently ranked among the top ten countries with the highest vulnerability to climate change impacts. Cambodia's draft *Second Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* indicates that the country's mean surface

temperature has increased by point eight percent Celsius since 1960. Changing climate conditions will increasingly put agriculture, infrastructure, water supply, ecosystems and human health and safety at risk. People who subsist below the poverty line and other groups such as women-headed households, children, the elderly, the disabled and indigenous communities, are particularly vulnerable.

Cambodia's vulnerability to climate change is due not only to climate risks however, but also to its still relatively limited capacity to adapt. Around eighty percent of the population lives in rural areas, mainly engaged in agriculture, with poor adaptive capacity and infrastructure. The draft *Second National Communication to the UNFCCC* also reveals that nearly fifty percent of communes in Cambodia are categorised as between either vulnerable or extremely vulnerable to climate variability.

Climate change is known as the single greatest threat to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Yet too often, one important fact gets lost amidst the fear: ***addressing climate change is also one of our greatest opportunities.*** Expertise in low-carbon and adaptive technologies will be in high demand. Countries that invest early in these areas will be ideally situated in this emerging market of expertise. Most importantly, integrating climate change in the national development strategy and indeed in all sectoral strategies mentioned by Samdach Prime Minister in his opening remarks this morning provides an opportunity to chart a sustainable model of growth for Cambodia, with the required balance between social, economic and environmental benefits.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me now briefly underline some of the approaches that could strengthen Cambodia's ability to respond to climate change.

First, ***integrating climate change into national and local development planning and budgeting processes is key to adaptation and climate proofing of investments.*** Climate Change and

Green Growth are already reflected in the Rectangular Strategy Phase Three. It is essential that they also be prioritised both in the new *National Strategic Development Plan*, as well as in the planning processes of sub-national entities. As we know what gets measured gets done. It is therefore also important to put in place robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track action against these plans. The United Nations Country Team has been engaged with national and sub-national partners to make climate change a standard feature of development planning and budgeting.

Second, as stated in the *Cambodian Climate Change Strategic Plan*, "Cambodia needs to develop towards a greener, low-carbon, climate-resilient, equitable, sustainable and knowledge-based society." In order to achieve this vision, it is crucial that ***an effective and transparent national framework be established, to monitor climate change-related activities and oversee the allocation of climate finance***, in line with national priorities.

Third, in this context, there is strength to be gained also from ***greater cooperation and partnership among all stakeholders***. Efforts to respond to climate change cannot be achieved by the government alone. Civil society, the private sector, and development partners need also to offer their full commitment and support to these national priorities.

Fourth, it is clear that the impacts of climate change affect all sectors, not only the environment. The conference branding is a good illustration. Thus, an ***integrated approach to addressing climate change is key, particularly to build resilience to climate risks at the local level. Further support and scaling up of such initiatives is needed***. One of the emerging lessons learned from various climate change and disaster risk reduction pilot projects is that a community's resilience improves when it is able to define its own priorities and propose solutions to climate change vulnerability in an integrated manner.

Fifth, while the focus of promoting resilience tends to center on the rural poor, ***increased migration to cities due to climate change makes urban resilience equally important***. We need to ensure the cities of the future are well-planned, sustainable and accessible to all.

Finally, I would like to propose we look at ***climate change through a gender lens***. The adverse effects of climate change risk deepening existing patterns of gender inequality, threatening the livelihoods and security of women. ***Yet, women in the community can also be positive agents of change and crucial contributors to livelihood adaptation strategies if they have the opportunity to participate in finding solutions***, and in making decisions both on setting policy and on implementing them.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

The United Nations has placed climate change high on the global development agenda. We are committed to continue partnering across sectors to support the Government's efforts to improve coordination, enhance awareness and understanding of climate change, and mobilise technical and financial support for capacity development, as well as to address policy and institutional gaps.

Assembled in this room today is an extraordinary group of climate change professionals: from scientists to field practitioners, policy-makers to private investors, researchers to civil society representatives and community leaders. Together, you have started to shape Cambodia's response to climate change. The next two and a half days will provide a great opportunity to share this wealth of experience. But this Forum is also about taking action. **Let us establish and strengthen here the concrete partnerships that are needed to realise the vision of a low carbon, climate resilient development model for Cambodia!**

Thank you.