Opening Plenary Fourth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

Acting Director-General of UNON, Maimunah Mohd Sharif

Monday, 11 March 2019 at approx. 10:00, 5 minutes

Your Excellency Mr. Siim Kiisler, President of the UN Environment Assembly and Minister of Environment of the Republic of Estonia

Mr. Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Kenya

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations

Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners

United Nations colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen, assalam aleikum wa rahmetullah ubarakatu.

A very good morning to you all, habari ya asubuhi!

Before I share with you a few remarks, I wish to join the President of the UN Environment Assembly and the Acting Executive Director of UN Environment on behalf of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and UN-Habitat, my deepest condolences and prayers to the people of the Great Nation of Ethiopia and to the families of the passengers and crew members who lost their lives in this tragedy. May the victims of this tragic accident, rest in eternal peace.

On behalf of the United Nations family in Kenya, wearing one of my hats as acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, otherwise known as UNON, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi — for this fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

The theme of this Assembly – "Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production" – is both timely and relevant. Changing today's unsustainable consumption and production patterns, including through innovation and creative approaches, is essential if we are to succeed in tackling the mounting environmental challenges facing our world.

Switching momentarily to my other hat as the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, I would like to reiterate the interlinkages between the theme of this session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and UN-Habitat's mandate and vision focused on providing a better quality of life for all through developing innovative, human-based solutions to challenges faced by those living in urban and all human settlements, leaving no one and no place behind.

As the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, this Assembly offers a historic opportunity to develop policies and foster a culture of innovation to advance sustainability and turn bold ideas into impactful action. I am sure that this meeting will also provide key guidance to UN Environment, the leading global environmental authority.

As it carries out its critical mandate, UN Environment can continue to count on the support of UNON. UNON and UN-Habitat are with you and we must work in partnership to develop innovative solutions to urban crises and challenges. By 2050, 80% of the world's population will live in cities. Worldwide climate change and global warming is the harsh reality we are facing, and we must begin employing implementable tools and strategies which will protect and conserve our environment.

This UN Environment Assembly session is taking place at a time when the United Nations is implementing global management and administrative reforms. The reforms are aimed at enhancing accountability, eliminating potential overlaps and ensuring the provision of cost effective and efficient services. UNON, UN Environment's primary service provider – is playing its part in these global reform efforts.

In addition to UN Environment, UNON is also providing administrative support to my own programme, UN-Habitat, as well as a range of common services to the many other United Nations offices based on this compound. As the third largest duty station after New York and Geneva, and the only UN Headquarters located in the developing world, these offices each contribute in some way to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in Kenya, in the region and around the world, to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

That is why we are taking significant steps to renovate and improve this compound, which has become a crucial hub for the United Nations' multi-faceted work.

Firstly, the General Assembly has approved funding for UNON to proceed with the project to replace the first office blocks ever constructed on the compound, over 40 years ago. They originally served as temporary office accommodation for the UN Environment secretariat. Those buildings – blocks A through J – are reaching the end of their design lives and need to be replaced.

The project will build on the positive experience of the last major construction work undertaken on the compound, the New Office Facility, which now serves as the global headquarters of both UN Environment and UN-Habitat. The project will ensure that the new building is one of the most environmentally advanced in the region, with universal accessibility, and green building facilities.

Secondly, the General Assembly has also requested the Secretary-General to provide detailed information regarding possible renovation work aimed at addressing the conditions and limited capacity of UNON's conference facility, and to present that information to the General Assembly during the main part of its 74th session. UNON is actively working on fulfilling that request.

Thirdly, we are becoming a more environmentally-friendly compound every year. In 2018, for example, UNON launched a waste collection and sorting station, sensitizing UNON colleagues on the waste we each produce starting at the individual source of solid waste management. This strategy has been utilized with a view to reducing landfill waste generated from this compound and increasing recycling. Last year, UNON also became the first UN headquarters in the world to eliminate the sale of single-use plastics at our cafeterias, as well as, have compound-based bicycles which enables us to move swiftly around the complex while reducing our carbon footprint

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Government of Kenya for its help in organizing this UN Environment Assembly session, as well as for its enduring partnership and strong support to the United Nations family and activities in Kenya.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations this week, and I hope you will enjoy your stay on the UNON campus.

Thank you for your kind attention. Asanteni sana!