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**Opening Remarks as Delivered by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer,  
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Secretary of  
the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and Special Advisor of  
the United Nations Secretary-General for Timor-Leste**

**Asia-Pacific Ministerial Dialogue: From the Millennium Development Goals  
to the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015  
Bangkok, 26 August 2013**

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Your Excellency, Mr. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão,  
Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste &  
Chair of ESCAP's 69<sup>th</sup> Commission Session

Your Excellency, Mr. Surapong Tovichakchaikul,  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 'Asia-Pacific Ministerial Dialogue: From the Millennium Development Goals to the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015.'

As the co-organizer of this Conference, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting and preparing this meeting, together with ESCAP.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

### **MDG's: Uneven Regional Achievements in a Changed World**

Long before the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the international community, Asia-Pacific countries were making great strides in transforming themselves and lifting millions of people out of poverty. It is no surprise then that our region has been an early achiever in halving the proportion of poor and in meeting other targets such as access to safe drinking water and gender parity at all levels of education.

The Asia-Pacific region still faces great challenges however – some are new and some are long-standing, whilst achievement of the MDGs remains uneven among our countries. Despite rising incomes and declining poverty rates, the region is still home to roughly two-thirds of the world's poor. There are persistent and widening gaps in income and poverty, among and within countries, and among different social groups. Violence against women and girls remains a deep-seated problem in many countries of the region.

In other words, there is much unfinished MDG business, and we need a last big push to 2015 if we are to further reduce poverty and deprivation. We must, therefore, emphasize the importance of meeting international commitments and shared responsibilities, including those relating to Official Development Assistance (ODA), access to markets, technologies,

and essential drugs as enshrined in MDG 8, notwithstanding the importance of mobilizing domestic and regional resources.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The world has changed.

The MDGs were conceived largely in a world of optimism given rise by the end of the Cold War and the “third wave of democratization”. We saw unprecedented consensus in the international community at landmark United Nations conferences and summits in the 1990s, which produced our internationally agreed development agenda, including the MDGs.

The sharp recovery from the financial crises of the late 1990s and subsequent boom in the global economy raised the prospect of continued progress at the dawn of the new millennium. It seemed that the era of boom and bust had given way to an era of “great moderation”.

In less than a decade however, *great moderation* tumbled into a *great recession*. Since 2006, we have seen excessive volatilities and hikes in key commodity prices culminating in the food and fuel crises in 2007, followed in 2008 by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

These events have pushed millions back into poverty and seen a wavering of commitments made by the international community – reflected in unfulfilled pledges and falling aid flows. Furthermore, the risks of climate change threaten to reverse our achievements and to undermine future gains

So, it is indeed a great feat that many Asia-Pacific countries have been early achievers in reducing the incidence of poverty. Furthermore, this has been achieved despite the region being hit by many significant natural disasters since the adoption of the MDGs.

When we discuss moving “From the Millennium Development Goals to the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015”, we must be mindful of the changed circumstances which have made closing development gaps more challenging and which have strained global consensus.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

### **A Transformative Agenda for Asia-Pacific**

Addressing these challenges calls for a new development model based on structural changes for equality, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainable development, as a more integrated whole. The next phase of development has to be driven by a transformative agenda that is people-centred, cares for our planet, and which generates shared and sustained prosperity.

As you are aware, the report by the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, called for a universal agenda driven by five big, transformative shifts.

What do these key transformational shifts mean for Asia and the Pacific?

The reality is that the existing Asia-Pacific growth path has not seen the fruits of prosperity sufficiently shared, and has exacted a high toll on our fragile natural resources. Inequalities have widened in many countries, and the “race to the bottom” has seen a slide in labour

standards and industrial safety, growing exploitation of migrant workers, women and girls, as well as environmental damage.

For Asia and the Pacific:

**“Leaving no-one behind”** means touching the lives of nearly two-thirds of humanity, of whom 1.7 billion live on less than \$2-a-day, 763 million are extremely poor, and 542 million go hungry<sup>1</sup>. We need to ensure that they have access to basic services, including modern and sustainable energy, fresh water, and adequate sanitation; good healthcare, educational facilities, and social protection services. It means promoting, protecting and fulfilling our commitments on human rights, including eliminating all forms of discrimination. Investments in people are needed to build resilience and reduce vulnerability. ESCAP’s *2013 Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* has shown that these investments for more forward-looking macroeconomics are within the means of most countries, although countries with special needs will require partnership.

**“Putting sustainable development at the core of the development agenda”** means changing how we live, produce and work. It means that the “grow first, distribute and clean up later” approach cannot sustain growth or meet the aspirations of both current and future generations, for an adequate standard of living within our planetary boundaries. A change of paradigm in key sectors such as energy, agriculture and fisheries, water resources management and urban development will be essential to meet the basic needs of people, in a way that promotes both resource efficiency and social equity. ESCAP’s Low Carbon Green Growth Roadmap for Asia and the Pacific provides examples of some successful practices in the region.

**“Transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth”** means touching the lives of world’s 73% working poor, and the 1.1 billion workers who are in vulnerable employment in our region, with more than 80 million young people who are looking for jobs.<sup>2</sup> It also means that the belief that low wages are necessary to attract foreign direct investment and promote economic competitiveness and growth, has lost credibility. Low wages contribute to low domestic demand. Income insecurity and very low wages also hinders investment in human capital.

**“Building peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all”** means recognizing freedom from fear of conflict and violence, as the most fundamental human entitlement. The Asia-Pacific region is still home to a number of long-term, internal conflicts, many of which are the results of prolonged deprivations, and injustices along different fault lines such as gender, ethnicity and religion. They are also the result of a lack of voice by the marginalized, coupled with an absence of accountability of those in power. We need open, effective and accountable public institutions to address social exclusion, gender inequality, injustice, crime and corruption – to ensure good governance and peaceful societies.

**“Forging a new global partnership”** means building genuine global partnerships, based on trust and not on conditionality. This is particularly critical for some of the most important development challenges faced by our region, including the need to rebalance trade, manage speculative flows of finance, ensure food security and livelihoods, secure appropriate development financing, promote technology transfer, and create conditions for fair trade. Many issues affecting human security, such as migration and natural disasters, also require both global partnerships and closer cross-border cooperation. Although the primary responsibility lies with individual countries, no country can tackle development challenges

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<sup>1</sup> 2012/2013 ESCAP-ADB-UNDP Regional MDGs Report

<sup>2</sup> 2012/2013 ESCAP-ADB-UNDP Regional MDGs Report

alone; we need a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability. It is ultimately about building greater levels of trust for humanity.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

### **From Vision to Action**

A universal global development agenda must recognize all the principles of Rio+20, and take into account the fact that countries and regions have different initial conditions and resources, and that there has to be sufficient flexibility to adapt the agenda at the local, national, and regional levels – with countries in the driver's seat.

We also need to look very specifically at the means of implementation for this new development agenda. It will be critical to find innovative sources of financing and create fiscal space by making spending and taxation more progressive. Although, ODA will not be a basic pillar of the post-2015 development agenda, it is still an unfulfilled promise that needs to be addressed.

What we are looking for is low-carbon growth, that is high on decent jobs, high on poverty reduction, and high on reducing inequality. In this context we need to address climate change and issues of volatility, ensuring that development gains are not lost due to natural or manmade disasters. We need to strengthen the resilience agenda.

Business has to be part of the solution. The business community cannot regard social and environmental concerns as external to their business. Modern business management should seek not only to increase market share, but to increasingly widen the market itself. In an age of diminishing resources, falling demand and shrinking revenues, the interests of our 'bottom billion' are the interests of business' bottom line.

Sustainable growth means strengthening all three pillars of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental – and recognizing that long-term prosperity requires a careful balance between benefits reaped today and ensuring the well-being of our people and our planet tomorrow.

The argument which we are making in Asia and the Pacific is that inclusiveness and sustainability are both interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Growth can only be inclusive if it is more sustainable, and it can only ever be sustained in the long-term by ensuring that it benefits the widest possible number of people, across generations.

We cannot afford to race to the bottom on labour standards, industrial safety or environmental protection. We cannot allow loss of lives of workers, or for toxic pollution to simply be shifted from developed to developing countries. People from around the world, and across the Asia-Pacific region, are asking for a new social contract for sustainable development, between the state and its people, and between the state and the market.

This social contract has to promote citizens' engagement, translating growth into productive employment for all. It has to adopt policies for the fairer redistribution of wealth, economic assets and opportunities – where there is better resource management and effective delivery of quality basic services to all. It also has to ensure better financial governance, addressing issues of money laundering and corruption, and encourage greater accountability of both the public and the private sectors, at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this conference is the first regional Ministerial-level event to discuss the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, following the release of the Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons. With the General Assembly preparing to consider this report at its sixty-eighth session, and move towards finalizing a United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015, a regional dialogue such as this could not be more timely for the countries of our region to articulate their concerns and aspirations.

Now is the opportunity for the Asia-Pacific region to lead on sustainable development and to contribute to the shaping of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Let us together create a region of which we can truly be proud - for ourselves and for our children and grandchildren.

I wish you the very best for this meeting and a very pleasant stay in Bangkok.

I thank you.