Press Breakfast on Climate Change Adaptation

Melrose Arch, Rosebank

8 November 2011

Opening Remarks by Dr Agostinho Zacarias, United Nations Resident Coordinator/Resident Representative

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased to be with you in this last of a series of press breakfast meetings that we have hosted as part of our support to the government of South Africa on CoP17. Our first breakfast was held at this venue in July and was graced by the Honourable Ms Edna Molewa Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, these breakfast meetings tackle a variety of topics related to climate change. Today’s breakfast meeting focuses on climate change adaptation. Reducing greenhouse gases is one of the most important ways of addressing climate, however, adaptation is also equally important because we are already feeling the impacts of climate change. Adaptation will, in fact, be one of the key areas of focus in the upcoming climate change negotiations in Durban. Climate change effects are being felt today and those who are suffering the most are the poor and vulnerable members of our communities. People in most of the African countries are going to be the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and South Africa is no exception. Unfortunately, the people who will bear the brunt of climate change the most are not the ones that caused the problem.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change will create a variety of challenges that, amongst others, include droughts, floods, desertification and heat waves. In a matter of years, climate change threatens to usher in widespread chronic hunger and malnutrition across broad swathes of the developing world. The developing countries are more vulnerable due to their low adaptive capacity and growing dependence on natural resources. Economic sectors that will be hit the most are water, agriculture, energy, health and tourism. Climate change has the potential to undo the progress that we are making towards the attainment of MDGs and the gains of sustainable development. Scientists are also predicting that by 2020, 75 to 250 million people in Africa will face growing shortages of water due to climate change. It important to note that even the world’s richest countries are not immune to climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In view of this dim picture, adaptation is not only urgent, but is a moral and practical imperative for addressing the unrelenting effects of climate change. The point is also clear: the climate is changing and so, therefore, must we. The challenge is how? The following are some of the potential ways of responding to the challenge:

* First, we need to transform our economies into low emission and clean energy pathways that pave the way to resiliency;
* Strengthen our capacity to adapt to climate change, and engaging the media to ensure that communities are made aware of the climate change challenge;
* Invest resources in making communities more resilient and reduce vulnerability;
* Invest in ecosystems that sustain us and green our development efforts; and
* Engage in risk reduction measures, as prevention is better than the cure.

Ladies and gentlemen

The negotiations in Durban will be critical for adaptation efforts. As you may know, a new Green Climate Fund is sought to be operationalized at CoP 17. Unlike previous climate change financing, this Fund is expected to fund adaptation efforts by developing countries. We, therefore, exhort you to support the growing advocacy to have this Fund become operational in Durban. A related decision linking adaptation governance to the GCF will also be critical.

 Ladies and gentlemen,

The road to adaptation requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders that include civil society, academia, media, politicians, religious leaders and others. As media, you have an important role of ensuring that you promote dialogue and disseminate information to all communities on climate change and how people can adapt. You are the voice of vulnerable communities. You can also play a key role to ensure that adaptation is seen as a fundamental investment into our common future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to end my speech by thanking you for supporting us on the media breakfasts and disseminating information on climate change. You have put the work and expertise of the United Nations Development Programme on climate change in the spotlight. I would also like to indicate that as UNDP we plan to continue our engagement with you to find ways in which we can further the good work that we have started on climate change advocacy. I would also like to thank the South African government for its support and wish them the best in the upcoming Conference of Parties on Climate Change, CoP17. I would like to thank Dr Katharine Vincent and Dr Lawrence Flint for coming to share their knowledge and experiences with us. I also extend my thanks to BDFM, our media partner, Exxaro for sponsoring this session, and McCann, our communications firm.

I would like to conclude my speech by quoting Charles Darwin who said: ‘It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the mostintelligent, but the most responsive (adaptive) to change.’

I thank you!!