**Ministerial Conference**

**Towards the Climate Summit in Paris:
Challenges for the Central European Initiative Member States**

**Holiday Inn Hotel, Skopje**

**6 November 2015**

**Opening speech by UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Louisa Vinton**

* Dear Minister Izairi
* Dear Ministers and delegations from the CEI member states
* Excellencies
* Distinguished guests
* Ladies and gentlemen
* On behalf of the United Nations family, it’s a pleasure and an honor to welcome you to Skopje for this important regional event dedicated to the fight against climate change.
* UNDP is proud to support this conference as a reflection of a partnership with the Ministry of Environment that has sought to promote sustainable development already over 15 years.
* With the clock ticking down to the opening of the Paris Climate Summit in under a month, and with many crucial issues still to be decided, this conference comes at a timely moment.
* Just two days ago, our Secretary-General reminded us that “climate change carries no passport and knows no national borders” so “countries must work toward the common interest.”
* This conference provides an opportunity to build regional momentum for the decisive global negotiations in Paris, which we hope will yield a “decisive and irreversible turning point.”
* For the United Nations globally, climate change is a priority, and not just because the UN by reason of its universal reach and mandate is the convener of the world’s climate negotiations.
* The impact of climate change is already being felt – whether in more frequent droughts or more erratic storms – and is already threatening decades of development progress worldwide.
* Environmental sustainability is central to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted by all 193 UN member states in September, and climate change – its importance recognized in an entire separate goal #13 – is at the heart of the sustainability agenda.
* The urgent need for action on climate change is clear here in the country.
* Research supported by UNDP shows that, if current patterns continue over 40 years, rising temperatures will cause a 45 percent decline in apple production and a 32 percent fall in grape production: truly a catastrophe for a country made justly famous by its fruits and wines!
* Other member states of the Central European Initiative face similar risks.
* Finding alternative low-carbon pathways is thus a must, and this quest is a focus of UNDP’s work both globally and in the country. Here, we are proud to have helped our national partners in meeting key reporting requirements and in submitting – as the 23rd country in the world – an INDC action plan for Paris.
* In this context, we salute the country’s commitment to reduce CO2 emissions from fossil fuels by 30 percent over the next 15 years.
* It is important to note here that the country’s INDC sees broader social and economic benefits from emissions reductions, including the direct creation of 6,000 “green jobs” by 2030.
* Finding ways to translate policy commitments into practice is an urgent necessity, and here UNDP has been working, for example, to help municipalities to make schools more energy-efficient and to introduce more sustainable farming practices among the famous Prespa apple growers.
* Now we see the need to engage the broader public in the fight against climate change, to ensure that policies are not mere words on paper and that each individual sees a personal role and responsibility in saving the planet from climate change.
* Gatherings such as this one offer a chance not only to take stock of country positions, but also to demonstrate the collective resolve that can help inspire greater public engagement.
* We look forward to hearing your views and are confident that the collective regional resolve shown here will be amplified in a victory for the world next month in Paris.
* Thank you for your attention!