

Statement by Ms. Akiko Yuge, Director
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Tokyo Office
at the 12th Environmental Congress for Asia and the Pacific
“ECO ASIA 2004”

Yonago, Japan, 19 June 2004

Your Excellency Ms. Yuriko Koike, Minister of the Environment,
Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mark Malloch Brown, I would like to express my appreciation to the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan for hosting this important Environmental Congress.

<MDG s >

Since world leaders signed onto the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (the MDGs), the international community has renewed its commitment to halving extreme poverty and meeting these goals by 2015. Of the eight Millennium Development Goals, the seventh goal is to “ensure environmental sustainability”. This particular goal is key to

achieving all the other goals.

(Situation in the Asia-and the Pacific region)

Rapid industrial development in the Asia and the Pacific region has brought many benefits. At the same time, it has also put the environment under increasing strain. Deforestation and pollution from industry, agriculture, domestic wood burning and human waste are creating increasingly hazardous living conditions.

One of the targets of the MDG Goal 7 is “Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water”. In our region, the most severe problems are faced in the rural area, where millions of people lack water from protected sources. Coverage of effective sanitation is even lower than for water supplies. It is a particularly serious problem for the millions of slum dwellers crowded into Asia’s giant cities. Although there have been some improvements, coverage still remains very low in a number of countries.

The status of the MDGs in the Asia and the Pacific region presents a sobering picture. Based on the present trends, very few countries in the region will meet all the goals, and some may meet none at all. The majority will fall in between, meeting some goals

but not others. The ones most likely to be achieved are those for income poverty and child mortality while those concerned with education, health and environmental sustainability seem more out of reach.

Following up on the outcome of WSSD, UNDP assists countries to build cross-sectoral capacities and put in place effective policies and institutions to both protect the environment and reduce poverty. UNDP's experience in various initiatives in this area, such as Capacity 21 and Capacity 2015 has demonstrated effective ways of enhancing national capacity.

Six policy principles should guide environmental policies:

- Strengthening institutions and governance;
- Making environmental sustainability part of all sector policies;
- Improving markets and removing environmentally damaging subsidies;
- Bolstering international mechanisms for environmental management;
- Investing in science and technology for the environment; and
- Increasing efforts to conserve critical ecosystems.

(Encouraging Community Involvement)

Successful environmental policies must see poor people not as part of the problem but as part of the solution. We recognize communities as key actors in achieving the goal of sustainable environment. Over the past decades, UNDP has pioneered several programmes that have successfully reached out to communities and supported grass-roots level initiatives. The Small Grants Programme (SGP) funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has provided support to more than 4000 projects to date and demonstrated local solutions.

One of the key elements for effective environmental management is environmental education. Most of our activities include environmental education, often focusing on awareness-raising to promote participation by all sectors of society. Among our initiatives, Cap-net, an International Network for Capacity Building in Integrated Water Resources Management, provides unique opportunities for environmental education. Cap-Net links hundreds of capacity building institutions and individuals across the world and offers opportunities for coordinated and sustained capacity development. With international partners, Cap-Net and

associated networks are delivering capacity building services to hundreds of water managers.

(Regional Cooperation)

Considering the diversity within the Asia and the Pacific region, there are many opportunities for regional and international partnerships that can promote human development and environmental sustainability. South-south cooperation should certainly be promoted further. Close partnership among governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, and communities is essential in accelerating progress.

The year that the MDGs are to be achieved is 2015. However, the year that we will know whether the MDGs will be achieved is not 2015 but much earlier, even as early as next year. At the UN General Assembly session in September 2005, there will be a summit level review of the first five years of the Millennium Declaration. What happens at this review session is certainly very important. However, what happens before this review — that is, from now until September 2005 — is crucial. As we

know well, it will take at least a decade of concerted efforts and focusing of resources to bring about major improvements — be it poverty trends, health outcomes, food security or gender equality. If there is any chance of leveraging up the scale of our interventions, that chance has to be seized and operationalized this year and next year. Discussions should focus not only on what it will take, but also on identifying barriers of capacity, governance, prioritization of spending by both developing and developed countries, which stand in the way of achieving the MDGs.

UNDP stands ready to make the utmost effort to promote environmental sustainability and support the attainment of the MDGs.

Thank you.