

12th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/GMEF

Nairobi, 20-22 February 2012

Opening statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States

(Monday 20 February 2012, 10:00-13:00)

Mr. President, Executive Director, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The Acceding Country Croatia aligns itself with this declaration.

We would like to start out by congratulating your Excellency, Mr. Federico Ramos de Armas, Secretary of State for Environment of Spain, with your election as President of this twelfth Special Session of the Governing Council. We would also like to thank the Government of Kenya for hosting this special session.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Executive Director Mr. Achim Steiner for his valuable leadership of UNEP and personal engagement in ensuring that emerging environmental challenges are prioritized and receive appropriate and adequate attention of governments and the international community. We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Amina Mohamed as new Deputy Executive Director, and we are looking forward to working with her in the years to come.

This year we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of UNEP as the principal body for the environment in the United Nations system. We recognize with great appreciation UNEP's contributions to improvements in the environmental realm over the past forty years and wish to congratulate on UNEP's 40th anniversary.

The international community can look back at many significant achievements since the strong link between development and the environment was acknowledged at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, which led to the establishment of UNEP.

The international community's determination to deal with the increasing environmental problems has since led to a number of environmental conferences and conventions addressing serious challenges to our planet. Crucial agreements have yielded, in particular the Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation in 2002. On every occasion, UNEP has demonstrated the ability to present the international community with a range of options for a better world.

However, notwithstanding some improvements of the environmental situation, the past forty years have also brought changes and challenges none of us could envisage, and we must acknowledge that in many ways the state of the environment has not improved since 1972.

It is therefore absolutely imperative that the international community stands united in initiating a profound world-wide transition towards a more sustainable future. This Special Session provides a welcome opportunity to do just that, and we are confident that the consultations will provide a timely and constructive input to the preparations for the Rio+20 Conference in June.

During this opening session, the EU and its Member States would like to stress the importance of accelerating and broadening the worldwide transition towards a green economy that promotes sustainable development and contributes to poverty eradication globally. We believe that a green economy offers win-win opportunities to all countries, and we recognize the very important and constructive contributions made by UNEP in this regard.

We also wish to underline the importance of improving the governance for sustainable development, including the environmental pillar. The EU and its

Member States actively support the incremental improvements of international environmental governance that were identified in the Set of Options presented by the Consultative group of Ministers or HL representatives on IEG (Belgrade process) and welcome progress made by UNEP in implementing these reforms. At the same time, more ambitious and broader reforms are necessary to respond to the fundamental problems of the current system. In this regard we support the upgrading of UNEP into a Specialized Agency for the Environment as part of the Rio+20 discussions on the reform of the institutional framework for sustainable development. We are looking forward to discuss these issues further during this Special Session.

A number of other important issues, which relates to green economy and international environmental governance, will be dealt with during this Special Session, including *inter alia* the world environment situation, sustainable consumption and production, as well as chemicals and waste. We hope that we can move forward on these issues and make the necessary decisions to guide UNEP's work in the coming years.

In conclusion let me just say that the EU and its Member States are looking forward to actively engage in open, constructive and fruitful consultations and we hope that this Special Session will send a strong political message on the different issues at stake. We should also take this opportunity to deliberate on the issues being discussed in the context of Rio+20, where we aim for a ambitious outcome with concrete measurable goals and actions at international level. I wish to assure you that the EU and its Member States will do their utmost in ensuring a satisfactory and ambitious outcome of this twelfth Special Session of the Governing Council.

Thank you.