

Introductory Remarks of
H.E. Ambassador Najla RIACHI ASSAKER
Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the U.N. in Geneva
Climate Vulnerable Forum MENA Workshop
Geneva 28-29 May 2015

Thanks a lot Mr. Neil Buhne for your kind words.

Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of our UNDP partners, the Ministry of Environment of Lebanon and myself, to warmly welcome you all. Your presence on such a short notice, despite your heavy schedules, is highly appreciated, and we are particularly happy to have some of your countries represented here by capital-based experts.

To my side, I am also delighted to have and to present to you such a distinguished panel, H.E. Ambassador Cecilia B. Rebong, the Permanent Representative of Philippines and the current Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, H.E. Ambassador Thomas Fitschen, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany, Ms. María Antonia Masana García, Deputy Permanent Representative of Peru, Mr. Philippe Ramet, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of France, and Mr. Ross Mountain, Lebanon United Nations Resident Coordinator & UNDP Resident Representative, and last but not least, the panelists from international organisations who have kindly agreed to join this workshop for the different panels today, and at this stage I would also want to thank you for your availability as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change is an important issue for MENA – for a number of reasons, many of which are reflected in the structure of this workshop. It happens that this region faces important geographical vulnerabilities to climate change, in particular being an arid one facing growing heat and water stress as has been consistently highlighted by the IPCC for instance. It also encounters unique socio-economic vulnerabilities, for example a heavy reliance on the import of foodstuffs that creates special sensitivities to international and local agricultural shocks. In addition, the region struggles with a number of transnational concerns that also have direct links to changes in the climate, such as migration and displacement of people, not least some other serious security situations and conflicts, both new and longstanding, a number of which have been theorized to have partial causal links to environmental factors and the effects of a warming climate.

MENA countries have a longstanding history of collaboration. Culture, values and language are among the things we have in common, but vulnerability to climate change has been

emerging as a new common threat and challenge to our region, therefore, a collaborative approach is much needed.

Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

Lebanon strongly believes that climate change adaptation is one diverse and multi-sectoral issue that necessitates not only the active involvement and participation of all national actors, but also the lessons learnt from experiences and projects of neighboring countries that are in the same struggle. It is in this mindset that we count on, inter-alia, the South-South collaboration opportunity offered via the Climate Vulnerable Forum in addressing climate change, to increase the efficiency of our actions, and to level up the climate change issue on the national and international agenda. I will not delve more on our own national policies now, as my colleague from the Ministry of Environment will further engage on this under the pertinent sessions.

Obviously, this event is part of a series of regional workshops taking place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific since last year. Lebanon will be presenting the conclusions of this workshop at a Global Consultation of the CVF in Bonn during the UNFCCC inter-sessional. We will shortly hear from the Chair of the Forum on the objectives of the CVF in respect of global processes. But the general purpose of this workshop is to identify common ground in the areas of climate change policy among countries particularly affected by this emerging global phenomenon, and to follow-up on shared concerns and interest areas with collaborative activities in the policy and communications space. We certainly hope the contribution of countries from our region will help boost these efforts which ultimately aim at strengthening the international response to a concern that is of such growing importance for our region, and our neighboring regions. Lebanon is really here to act as a convener and to facilitate an exchange of views among ourselves. We will make sure that our views are effectively transmitted forward to the further efforts of the Climate Vulnerable Forum to advocate at the global level on behalf of developing countries vulnerable to climate change irrespective of region or other traits. We are also sure that each of us will take something home from the valuable exchange of experiences and best practices today and tomorrow.

The format of this workshop also follows a set programme structure that has been employed for the other regional meetings of this Forum in Asia, Africa, the Pacific and elsewhere. We will be exchanging views on a number of focused and interlinking topics and then we will hear from country representatives on their experiences. Tomorrow there will be a number of working sessions that aim to develop the outcome of this workshop, which will take the form of a set of recommendations from the MENA States gathered here on what could be done to improve the response to climate change in our region. This Forum is not a formal process, and our outcome will not be legally binding, therefore please do let me encourage you all to take advantage of this time in Geneva away from the usual work distractions for a short moment and to be outspoken and innovative in your consideration of issues and deliberations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We know that the French government has an enormous responsibility on their shoulders in playing host to the critical climate change summit at the end of this year under the UNFCCC. We do hope that our efforts today and tomorrow here, by helping to include this region in broader global policy initiatives, will play its very modest role in contributing towards a successful outcome in Paris. Certainly, the whole world eagerly anticipates results from Paris and we will all need to become increasingly collaborative in order to ensure get there. We will hear more about the process of the next Conference of Parties from our French and Peruvian colleagues.

(Perspectives from the MENA region will be highlighted by the UNDP and UN Resident Coordinator, and last but not least, I would like to extend our appreciation the German Government for their generous contribution to this and other events under the CVF and their dedication to efforts on global climate change in general.)

Finally, I want to thank heartedly our UNDP partners (Geneva Office) for their relentless efforts and collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Lebanon in organizing and hosting this workshop. Their contributions are invaluable.

Thanks you all for being here today.

I would like now to invite H.E.. Ambassador Cecilia B. Rebong, the Permanent Representative of Philippines, chair of the CVF to take the floor.

Panelists to be given the floor in order by H.E. Ambassador of Lebanon.