Remarks by Mr. Achim Steiner to the 18th **Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Rio+20—A Paradigm Shift Towards a Sustainable Century**

**Quito, ---**

**(Who he should recognize)**

Excellencies,

You are meeting here in the beautiful city of Quito, thanks to the generosity of the Government of Ecuador, on the eve of UNEP’s Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum taking place in Nairobi at the end of this month and just some five months before what Mr. Ban ki-Moon, the UN Secretary-General has described as a once-in a generation opportunity.

Namely: the UN Conference on Sustainable Development or Rio+20.

The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean has, over 27 years, assisted in building the foundation for the sustainable development of this region.

You have made remarkable successes: to mention a few**:-**

* Since 1992 environmental legislation and institutions have been strengthened and sustainable development has been introduced in public policies and national programmes
* In 2002, the Forum adopted the *Latin American and the Caribbean Sustainable Development Initiative* (ILAC), which provides a framework of priority areas and specific activities aimed at integrating the environment perspective approach in the social, economic and institutional sectors
* The total surface of protected areas has doubled and now stands at over 20% of the region’s territory
* Major advances have been registered in relation to toxic chemical and waste management

In Brazil, the host of Rio+20 recent rates of deforestation have been markedly cut—perhaps the biggest emission reduction of any country in the past 12 or so months has happened in Brazil

Argentina is one of eight countries with more than a million hectares now under organic agriculture and is one of the fastest growing organic producers world-wide, up 1.2 million hectares between 2007 and 2008 alone.

Ecuador has centered its development strategy around a “National Plan of Good Living,” that puts human well-being and sustainability at the center of economic planning, and has enshrined rights to a healthy environment in its Constitution, making it an inspiring model of sustainable development in Latin America and beyond.

Bolivia’s ‘life plans’ aimed at more sustainably managing the lands of indigenous peoples and overcoming poverty are a beacon.

Mexico’s energy policy is aimed at increasing its renewable power generation capacity to 7.5% of its energy mix by 2017 and reducing its carbon emissions by 20% by the year 2020

Costa Rica has taken a commitment to become carbon neutral by 2021 based on its national strategy on climate change. Barbados, with its plans to install solar water heaters in 50 per cent of households by 2025— is on a trajectory to reach this goal even earlier.

The list is long and rich in examples.

But like all regions of the globe, we know that the successes are being overshadowed by the speed of environmental changes that are challenging the very life support systems that sustain progress and prosperity, especially among the poor and the vulnerable.

Natural disasters, for example, have increased in terms of frequency and strength; large drought periods are being faced by countries in the region, negatively impacting food security and poverty and hunger rates.

Overall deforestation rates in the region are unsustainable, and biodiversity is threatened by expanding agricultural and urban frontiers and economic growth.

Excellences,

We live in a world of seven billion people—1.5 billion more than in 1992—and we face the challenge of more than nine billion by 2050.

1.3 billion are under employed and unemployed globally—many of those in Latin America and the Caribbean—with an estimated half a billion more that will be join the job seekers over the next decade world-wide.

How to grow economies, lift people out of poverty, generate decent jobs and do all this without pushing humanity’s footprint beyond planetary boundaries?

That is the challenge and opportunity of Rio+20 under its twin themes of a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework for sustainable development.

I know that in this region the concept and analysis of the Green Economy has been subject to animated debate and detailed discussion.

There are some countries who consider that there is an excessive emphasis on ‘monetizing’ nature and that its services are being priced rather like consumer goods. Others are concerned considering that market mechanisms will produce unhealthy results and concentrate natural wealth in the hands of the few. Still others have expressed their preference for the term “Ecological Economy” as it denotes an even stronger reliance and more direct connection to the natural world.

I can assure you that UNEP shares these concerns and we understand that nature’s worth should be recognized in terms of its spiritual and cultural dimensions, as well as its social benefits. We all stand behind the objective of development in harmony with Nature, because we recognize that it is the very foundation of all life – and protecting nature is at the very core of UNEP’s mission.

But, its economic value should also be recognized in order to enhance the likelihood of its survival in a world of competing interests where all too often current ideas of returns on investment in the short term, tip the balance in favour of unsustainable rather than sustainable development.

It is clear, that nature and its services are the wealth of the poor and that the poor’s wealth—and their role in maintaining and sustaining it-- should be recognized more formally if they are to thrive and enjoy a right to development in a globalized world. We know from experience that it is precisely the poor and socially excluded who suffer most from environmental degradation. We therefore need strong institutions that are capable of addressing this situation and correcting the market failures which produced the unsustainable outcomes we currently experience.

There are known risks of the current models which are today far greater than those proposed and we now have the opportunity to design a new model, such as Green or Ecological Economy within the Framework of Sustainable Development, taking into account that there is no single “one size fits all” model.

In short, UNEP’s view is that the Green Economy is not an alternative to sustainable development but a means to implement the aspirations, and agreements of Rio 1992. And whether we call it a green or ecological economy – it is first and foremost about recognizing the value of nature and making this a cornerstone of development and economic policies

In respect to Rio+20s second theme—that debate is also maturing in advance of the Summit and will be further explored and refined at UNEP’s upcoming Governing Council in a few weeks’ time.

This framework should and must be more than an environmental consideration—but equally, without a reform or a strengthening of International Environmental Governance, the work, role and influence of many ministers responsible for the environment may continue to be marginalized.

Many submissions to the UN are now supporting the strengthening of UNEP, perhaps into an organization, in its 40th anniversary year.

The debate, between now and June, is likely to pivot around how such a strengthening might be structured and why.

Let me mention a few considerations at the heart of that debate.

UNEP’s Governing Council meets annually, but the decisions taken by environment ministers are referred to New York where they can be agreed or quite literally dismissed as part of the General Assembly process.

In addition, it may surprise some to learn that UNEP's Governing Council does not have provision for universal membership of member states to date.

Equally, there is a need for an anchor institution to provide authoritative policy guidance to the Multilateral Environment Agreements in order to address fragmentation and build a far more strategic direction between all the distinct parts of the current environment corpus.

A more authoritative and strengthened body could also get to grips with the issue of financing.

Currently, decisions on international distribution of funds for the environment are often taken in other parallel forums such as that of the Global Environment Facility.

Meanwhile, the lack of a central and anchoring policy framework is leading to increased costs, inefficient targeting of scarce financial resources and curtailed consequences for achieving sustainability.

Another glaring gap linked with the existing governance arrangements is implementation.

To put it simply the world invests significant time, skill and capacity in negotiating and agreeing treaties, targets and timetables but far less in actually making these agreements happen on the ground and where it matters.

Other important elements include building accountability into existing and future environmental agreements and decisions, backed up by peer review and review mechanisms.

The effectiveness of systems of implementation can also benefit from partnerships with civil society and their knowledge, networks and independent scrutiny.

Finally science: Sound science underpins sound policy-making, but all too often that wealth of scientific knowledge available to governments is unfiltered or unfit for cooperative decision making.

A comprehensive science-policy interface spanning the full range of environmental challenges and sectors and capable of building scientific capacity in developing countries is another key link in this forward-looking governance debate.  
  
Overall such reforms will also contribute to other goals such as those enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on improved access to information, public participation and access to justice in environment matters.

The Rio Earth Summit of 1992 was an extraordinary event—it laid the foundations of much of this Forum’s pathways and the pathways of ministers of the environment across the globe but we all know that a great deal remains to be achieved and time is no longer on our collective side.

Rio+20 needs to be more than a reflection, and certainly not a moment for disunity or finger-pointing, as so often can characterize international meetings.

It is a time for a paradigm shift in cooperation and a moment to accelerate and scale-up many of the extraordinary transitions already underway in this region and elsewhere.

In doing so, Rio+20 can finally fulfil the promises of a previous generation to the current one and the generation to come and in doing so set the firm and steady course for a sustainable century which is in the interests of all shades of the political spectrum and the interests of our collective humanity.

Thank you, muchas gracias, merci, obrigado