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**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE  
PACIFIC**

The follow-up meeting of the 2010 SPECA Economic Forum “Launching a Plan of Action to Strengthen Stability and Sustainable Development in Afghanistan through Regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia”

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

7-8 June 2011

**MESSAGE FROM DR. NOELEEN HEYZER  
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ESCAP**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates

Representatives of international organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me, together with my colleagues from ECE, to welcome you at the follow-up meeting of the 2010 SPECA Economic Forum, “Launching a Plan of Action to Strengthen Stability and Sustainable Development in Afghanistan through Regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia” under the framework of the

United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

We attach high priority in our work programme to support countries with special needs, including Asia-Pacific's 12 Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), which includes all the SPECA countries. In particular, global mandate for our work includes Almaty Programme of Action for LLDCs, which addresses the special needs of LLDCs in transit transport cooperation.

Excellencies, Distinguished participants,  
ladies and gentlemen,

SPECA countries are constituents of both ESCAP and ECE, and our joint efforts to support SPECA countries, including Afghanistan, mean that we can bring the lessons and experiences from both region, Asia-Pacific and Europe. We at ESCAP are exploring how best to assist countries with LLDCs including of course SPECA countries, and how to bring impetus of the dynamic economic growth and prosperity seen in our Asia Pacific region.

Having said that, we are well aware of the continuing vulnerability of the Asia-Pacific region to global economic forces and the need to sustain growth and make it inclusive. The food, fuel and financial crises of recent years and the resurgence of food and fuel price inflation across the region last year, underscore the increasing risk and stress global forces have on the people and countries of our region.

With such development, landlocked developing countries, with their geographical isolation, are even more vulnerable and often the hardest hit by rapid global economic swings. Economies in the North and Central Asian countries tend to experience sharper declines and upswings due to their heavy reliance on oil and gas, metals and other commodities. Hence, diversifying the sources of economic growth, including through the development of the non-oil sector, will be important not only for future growth but also for greater socio-economic stability.

The development of a common infrastructure in the oil and gas industries is a key issue for strengthening cooperation in the energy sector in North and Central Asia. Specific policy areas to be addressed include the efficient management of the existing infrastructure and the creation and implementation of a joint development programme for oil, gas and electricity based on forecasts of subregional energy demand. Most important, it involves looking at the energy infrastructure as a systemic whole and preventing the accumulation of bottlenecks within the subregion.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

In every challenge, there is an opportunity. Based on the unique nature of Afghanistan and the Central Asia, we can explore opportunities for strengthening economic cooperation in three closely

interlinked areas: trade and investment, infrastructure development, and joint and mutually beneficial management of shared resources. In that context, the accelerated implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is urgently needed which calls for improved infrastructural connectivity to link landlocked and transit countries of this region with major trading centers. This is also critical for Afghanistan, a landlocked and transit country.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

As you may know, I have signed the Host Country Agreement with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan on establishing the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia in Almaty, Kazakhstan which will also facilitate the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) supported by ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Europe.

The ESCAP Subregional Office better positions the UN regional arm to address sustainable and inclusive development priorities in the subregion comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The Subregional Office for North and Central Asia will promote subregional cooperation, partnerships and knowledge sharing among the member countries, the private sector, civil society and other

development partners for inclusive and environmentally friendly development for all. The new Subregional Office will focus on transport and trade facilitation, water and energy management and sustainable development. The Almaty Subregional Office joins other ESCAP Subregional Offices in the Pacific, East and North-East Asia, and South and South-West Asia in an integrated network of ESCAP offices dedicated to serve its member states.

Needless to say, these Offices are closely linked with substantive divisions of ESCAP Secretariat in Bangkok, which have expertise to assist countries in achieving inclusive and sustainable development and provide support in areas such as trade, transport, energy, water resources, social development, and so on. Let me assure you that we stand ready to support the programme and plans that you are developing in the next two days and I urge you to utilize our Subregional Offices as the representative of ESCAP in this region.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Today's discussions will focus on trade and investment, infrastructure development and joint management of shared resources. Choices made here will have profound implications for many decades in the region and beyond. I also hope that the outcomes of the 2010 SPECA Economic Forum and its follow up meeting will find ways to strengthen

the regional cooperation in Central Asia to more effectively contribute to achieving long-term stability in Afghanistan.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.

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