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**“Going Beyond GDP: SEEA as a Framework for
Measuring the Future We Want”**

**Opening Remarks (10 minutes) for
International Conference on Global Implementation of
the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting**

17 June 2013

UN Secretariat 27th Fl Conf Room S-2726 and S-2727

Distinguished delegates, fellow panelists,

It is my great pleasure to join you at the opening of this international conference on global implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

This event marks one of several important milestones along our journey to achieve the MDGs, to deliver on the renewed promises of Rio+20, and to help lay the foundation for the emerging post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, SEEA, offers an integrated statistical framework that underpins our broader efforts to “Go Beyond GDP”.

As the recent report of the High-Level Panel on post-2015 recognizes, as well as the findings from the global consultations on the world that people want, if we are to eradicate poverty and advance sustainable development for present and future generations, a data revolution is needed. That means not just strengthening official statistical systems, but also taking advantage of new forms of data generated through our interactions with mobile phones and other technologies.

And the SEEA represents an essential and strong positive force for this revolution, for Going Beyond GDP.

Many of you are familiar with the following quote from the late Robert Kennedy. In 1968 he recognized that:

“Our gross national product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, ... the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our

natural wonder in chaotic sprawl... Yet [it] does not allow for the health of our children [or] the quality of their education. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; our wisdom nor our learning; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile¹.”

With these eloquent words, Kennedy at once captured both the challenge and the fundamental motivation for Going Beyond GDP, a people-centered vision which we are still fighting for five decades later.

Equity, dignity, happiness, sustainability – these principles are fundamental to our lives, but absent in the GDP measure. Progress needs to be measured in ways that reflect the broader tapestry of human development and its richly intertwined strands of social justice, environmental stewardship, and inclusive growth.

There are of course already many Going Beyond GDP Initiatives led by different development actors.

¹ Remarks at the University of Kansas, March 18, 1968

UNDP's first [Human Development Report](#) in 1990 recognized the limitations of existing development metrics and introduced the Human Development Index as an alternative to GDP.

This index captures key elements of human development, including education, longevity and a decent standard of living.

UNDP has added new indices to capture the integrated reality of our communities and societies, such as the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, and we continue to explore options to integrate environmental sustainability concerns into the Human Development Index, while recognizing that this poses a number of large conceptual and methodological challenges, including:

- how best to link present choices with future choices - do they have the same weight?

- how to reflect concepts of 'planetary boundaries' or 'tipping points' given that climate change in particular has already begun imposing significant costs on people, with the brunt being felt by poor nations and poor communities;

-how to connect issues of global responsibility with the need to ensure equal rights of all citizens on this planet.

These types of questions and the need for better approaches for measuring progress beyond short-term economic indicators are of course also being addressed through the leading work of many international institutions and partners including:

- the [Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission](#)
- the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's [Better Life Initiative](#) and Measuring the Well-Being of Societies; and
- the UN Secretary General's High-level Global Sustainability Panel, which astutely observed that "if it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed."²

This work is complemented by several additional composite indices and related initiatives including:

² "Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing" available at www.un.org/gsp

- The World Bank's Adjusted Net Savings
- UNEP's Inclusive Wealth Index
- the Ecological Footprint
- Bhutan's Gross National Happiness approach,
- related subjective measures of well-being;
- and efforts to tap into the power of real-time Big Data.

And so it is within this larger measurement context that the centrality of SEEA becomes so important as an approved integrated statistical monitoring and organizing framework.

The large and growing number of innovative measurement initiatives also underscores the need for better coordination.

And in fact, one of the key objectives of this Conference is to strengthen international, regional, and national coordination among development

partners to implement the SEEA, including through links to the post-2015 agenda.

Let me expand briefly on this issue of coordination and partnerships.

As Dr. Akthar has mentioned, there are already several existing mechanisms for collaboration within and across the UN System and with multilateral and bilateral partners.

These include global programmes such as:

-The World Bank-led programme for Wealth Accounting and the Evaluations of Ecosystem Services, or WAVES;

-The UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative, and related inclusive green economy initiatives;

-And TEEB, among many others.

While these initiatives are making great strides, we can do better.

We can strengthen our coordination efforts across the sustainable development policy cycles each of our organizations is trying to influence with respect to: our advocacy and awareness raising; our analysis and assessments; and our efforts to inform the design, implementation, financing and tracking of more inclusive, sustainable development policies.

Each of these objectives depends on the availability and use of the type of rigorous integrated data and national accounts that the SEEA framework and its implementation can help promote.

Of course we also need to ensure that the social dimensions of sustainable development measures, only partly captured by SEEA, are also strengthened. How can the measures we use reflect the concerns and contributions of women and men, indigenous peoples, youth and the elderly, rural and city workers, and above all the poorest and most vulnerable whose lives and livelihoods depend on the ecosystems

services and natural capital on which we are trying to place an economic value.

For this, we can learn much through the world's ongoing work on tracking and assessing the achievement of the MDGs, and also through the global, national, and thematic consultations now taking place as part of 2015 preparations.

To be successful we need to do a better job of bringing together different development communities at all levels, within and across regions: statisticians and policy-makers, politicians and academicians, social advocates and researchers, practitioners and partners from governments, civil society, and the private sector.

And this week's Conference and your participation here demonstrates that we can break down the silos of our work.

We come from different disciplines, different mandates and perspectives, but our common goal to make the Future We Want a reality, means going beyond business as usual.

In her remarks, Dr. Akthar called on us all through the work of this Conference to answer several questions: how can SEEA contribute to post-2015 discussions; how can it inform goals, targets, and indicators setting; how to implement SEEA in different country contexts through new and strengthened partnerships?

Now, these are not easy questions and I wish all participants success in these important efforts.

And by way of closing, let me simply reiterate the commitment of UNDP to continue its close collaboration with DESA, the Convention on Biological Diversity, other co-organizers of this conference, and all partners to: support the implementation of SEEA; to strengthen its links to Rio+20 follow-up, 2015 preparations and the Sustainable Development Goals; and to coordinate this work as part of broader efforts to Go Beyond GDP, eradicate poverty and achieve more inclusive, sustainable development.

Thank you.