Statement by Mr. Luc Stevens,

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Conference on

Building Strategic Partnerships against Corruption in the Arab Region

Amman, 26-27 October 2010

Your Excellency the Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Mr. Samir Al Refai

Your Excellencies the Ministers and High-Level Representatives of the Arab countries,

Distinguished Guests and Colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and it is an honor to speak to you today on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme about our commitment to work with you to prevent and combat corruption, which is no longer a matter of local concern alone, but also a transnational concern that requires our attention and concerted cooperation.

UNDP's stand against corruption is driven by its more than 60 year-old mandate on reducing poverty and promoting human development. In the Arab States region alone, UNDP spends more than 600 million dollars a year on development and works closely with national and international partners to attract and use aid effectively.

Corruption hurts human development, diverts public resources to private gain, reduces access to public services and undermines democracy. Corruption impedes the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Quantifying the magnitude of corruption both at the national and international levels is a challenge. Some studies have suggested that the cost of corruption exceeds by far the damage caused by any other single crime. More than $1,000 billion is paid in bribes each year, according to an ongoing World Bank Institute research on estimated actual bribes paid worldwide in rich and developing countries. Other studies by the Asian Development Bank have shown how corruption can cost a country up to 17 per cent of its GDP.

The case for anti-corruption is made by the UN Secretary-General:

> When public money is stolen for private gain, it means fewer resources to build schools, hospitals, roads and water treatment facilities. When foreign aid is diverted into private bank accounts, major infrastructure projects come to a halt. Corruption enables fake or substandard medicines to be dumped on the market, and hazardous waste to be dumped in landfill sites and in oceans. The vulnerable suffer first and worst.

In the Arab states region, the last four years have witnessed a visible growth in anti-corruption cooperation. Policy dialogue shifted towards more concrete approaches to the prevention and combating of corrupt practices. Integrity became a more focal element in the discourse on good governance. This new reality is mainly attributed to the advent of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which is acting as a rallying factor for the vast majority of Arab countries, with 16 Arab countries committing to implement it so far. The recent adoption of the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the convention is expected to provide additional opportunities to deepen cooperation with a view to supporting more vigorous implementation efforts and cooperation between State Parties across the world, and especially between the countries of the global south.

Today, UNDP is proud to be a major partner for Arab countries in the area of anti-corruption. Through its regional Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) and a number of country programmes, UNDP supported Arab countries to become State Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, and embark on related implementation efforts. It also supported civil society engagement and various public administration reform and rule of law initiatives.[1]

In Jordan, UNDP has supported anti corruption efforts since 2003 and we have considered anti corruption as one of our top priorities. Currently, UNDP is providing a programme of support to the Anti Corruption Commission to implement parts of its National Anti Corruption Strategy. This programme of support is implemented through a clearly defined capacity development framework that ensures full ownership by the Commission.

[1] UNDP, Bureau for Development Policy, "Public Administration and Local Governance: An Overview of UNDP's Recent and Current Interventions in the Arab States Region", 2010.

Several Arab countries, including Jordan, have begun making progress towards more transparent and accountable governance, including concrete steps towards the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption. However, efforts to address corruption in sectors that provide basic social services, such as energy, health, education and water and sanitation remain very limited. Mainstreaming integrity standards and practices into these sectors is critical for the achievement of better levels of human development and human security in the Arab region. It is also critical for the achievement of the MDGs, which, if things continue as they are, could be completely or partially missed by a significant number of Arab countries.

We convene here today under the banner of the **Conference on Building Strategic Partnerships against Corruption in the Arab region**, which underlines your commitment to contribute to this emerging anti-corruption movement in the Arab countries. I hope that in the coming two days, we will be able to jointly explore and identify ways to build and sustain such partnerships in a more inclusive and effective manner.

At the end of the conference, my colleagues will launch the Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries (ACIAC) Project, which is conceived as an instrument that will promote cooperation and collective action against corruption in Arab countries and add value to related bilateral and multilateral efforts. The project will engage stakeholders from all Arab countries in the framework of the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network, and will provide customized country-specific support based on demand. The project will also seek to maximize the potential for joint learning at the regional level, and across regions, whenever feasible.

In conclusion, I wish to recognize the hospitality of the Kingdom of Jordan and the Jordanian Anti-Corruption Commission and express my pleasure to be with you today. I wish you a successful conference in the city of Amman.