

Statement by Mr. Norimasa Shimomura, UNDP Country Director for Tajikistan

**At the “International Trade and Investment Conference”
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*Your Excellency Minister Hikmatullozoda,
CC Yu and development partners,
Distinguished representatives of state bodies
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great honor for me to participate in this conference, which is devoted to key priorities for the country concerning trade and investment. On behalf of UNDP in Tajikistan I express my sincere appreciation to the organizers of this event and particularly to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and Asian Development Bank. I am happy to note that the conference not only discusses the opportunities presented by Tajikistan’s WTO membership and its associated economic adjustments, but also provides a platform for strengthening the public-private dialogue that is needed for effective and participatory reform processes.

Tajikistan has taken many steps towards the implementation of such global obligations as the Millennium Development Goals and achievement of national priorities expounded in the national development strategies. One of the most noteworthy results in this respect has been the significant decline in the poverty rate from 81% in 1999 to 32% by the end of 2014. To achieve this, Tajikistan has introduced reforms to support socio-economic development and improve the business and investment climates—as has been duly recognized by the international community.

Certainly, there are still many challenges ahead of us. Developing economies such as Tajikistan are particularly volatile and susceptible to external shocks. The global and regional economic and political setting may change in a short time, as we may witness nowadays in Russia and Central Asia. In view of this Tajikistan has to develop solid capacity to analyse, mitigate adversities and to adapt to those developments if they occur, on a timely manner. In spite of all these challenges, we are presented with opportunities for economic integration provided by the WTO and other platforms – and this is why we are here today to discuss how the country can maximize the benefits from these opportunities.

While pursuing these goals, I would like to especially emphasize that we should not lose sight of why we promote trade, investment and economic development. We should not forget that we do this because we want to promote the wellbeing of all people living in this country and that doing so is also in the interest of people living in other countries; that we do this because it is so important to reduce poverty and inequalities, to improve food security, and strengthen employment opportunities. We are talking about human development – because without it, economic and business growth will not be sustainable.

UNDP globally and locally promotes human-centered development. All our activities are aimed at building empowered and resilient nations through enhanced livelihoods and improved access to rights and services. At the same time, we always align our efforts with national priorities and strategies. Our joint work with national partners starts from support to policy development and ends with the local level interventions needed to make changes happen for the people.

Tajikistan is at the final year of implementation of its long- and medium-term development strategies. Last year during the review of

the National Development Strategy, which culminated with the Development Forum in February 2015, we had a chance to review and discuss the country's current challenges and future priorities such as: ***diversification, competitiveness and economic effectiveness***. UNDP believes that Tajikistan's commitment towards these priorities can significantly strengthen the country's resilience to external shocks and reduce people's vulnerability. UNDP also believes that economic development must be pursued hand in hand with good governance because doing so can reduce disparities in socio-economic standings between men and women, rich and vulnerable, and between those living in cities and remotest villages of the country. This is why UNDP continues to support the Government of Tajikistan in the completion of the National Development Strategy 2007-2015, and support elaboration of the new National Development Strategy and Midterm development document – to promote equity and sustainability while supporting to strengthen the country's economy.

Trade and investments are key drivers for human development. UNDP helps the authorities to better manage and improve the environment for business development and investments; we help the private sector to create more jobs for the poor; and we seek to improve household income generation opportunities. UNDP has been active in supporting trade in Tajikistan especially in the following areas: First, we promote SMEs and private sector development as well as the enabling environments they need to grow in. Second, we provide direct support to entrepreneurs and small businesses to improve their processing and export capacities. Third, we seek to increase opportunities for better trade and better access to export-oriented value chains, to increase income- and employment-generation opportunities for poor and vulnerable households.

More specifically during 2014-2015, 11 SMEs from Tajikistan's agro-processing sector (half of whom received HACCP certification) were helped to participate in trade exhibitions and concluded contracts worth some USD 2.5 million, expanding job opportunities in the country. We also worked with UNCTAD to use best international practice in formulating regional trade development strategies and national export promotion programme. We support public-private dialogues at the local level, improve access to finance, offer vocational education, and seek to expand opportunities for cross-border collaboration. Once, I visited a cross-border market between Tajikistan and Afghanistan which UNDP helped to establish. I saw with my own eyes how these markets give a choice to people living in remote areas of the countries, to live and work in their homeland without having to work abroad leaving behind their loved ones.

Finally, in light of the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September, I am pleased to note Tajikistan's active participation in the initial round of global conversations on the post-2015 Development Agenda. Consultative processes organized by the UN in Tajikistan, with the help of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, contributed to identifying priorities for the country's own development agenda beyond 2015. These priorities include **Employment**, particularly concerning the need to improve the labor market, create jobs and regulate labor migration; as well as **Governance**, in terms of improving the public administration, curbing corruption, and increasing civic engagement.

UNDP will continue to support the Government of Tajikistan in formulating and implementing its economic development strategies in the future, in a manner that will improve quality of life for all people

living in Tajikistan. We are eager to learn from today's discussion how a human development organization like UNDP can best promote trade and investment for the benefit of all people living in Tajikistan including the poor, vulnerable and marginalized. I wish us all a fruitful dialogue and successful work at this conference.

Thank you.