



The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya
To the United Nations- New York

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR MARTIN KIMANI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

AND

PRESIDENT OF THE UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS EXECUTIVE BOARD

DURING

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**Members of the Bureau, the Executive Board, and Observer Delegations,
Representatives of the Agencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I welcome you to the 2023 Annual Session of the Executive Board of the UN Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

I also welcome the recent appointment of **Mr. Jorge Moreira da Silva** as Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNOPS. And I wish him success in his new role.

I thank delegations for the level of commitment demonstrated in the First Regular Session and in the lead up to the Annual Session. Our consultations provided a surer grasp of the impact of the efforts by these agencies. With that understanding, our duty is to make decisions that enhance their ability to deliver.

These agencies, navigating and responding to overlapping waves of global and regional crises, have managed to improve millions of lives around the globe. The first year of implementing their 2022-2025 Strategic Plans has offered examples of their growing commitment to coordinating with one another and other relevant agencies.

I commend the dedicated staff at UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS for their unwavering -- and very frequently courageous -- commitment to transforming lives, instilling hope, and trying to ensure that no one is left behind. The number of programs, projects and initiatives that reflect these qualities are numerous. I want to share just one to move us momentarily out of these hallowed halls and closer to the lives our decisions affect.

One fateful day, on 30th May, less than a week ago, an urgent mission was set in motion off the shores of Yemen's Ras Issa peninsula. A salvage vessel, bearing our collective hopes, cut through the waves making its way toward the FSO Safer supertanker moored off Yemen's Red Sea Coast. For years, this dormant, rotting leviathan has held within it a ticking time bomb of over a million barrels of oil. At any moment, even as we sit here, catastrophe can strike.

As the vessel neared the stricken tanker, the stakes were clear, and terrifying. Yemen's bustling fishing communities, over half a million strong and supporting an additional 1.7 million dependents, would have to wait 25 years for fish stocks to recover were the Safer to spill its cargo.

The potential fallout would extend far beyond Yemen's shores. The Ras Issa peninsula is a lifeline in the world's energy trade. An oil spill here would disrupt maritime traffic and global energy supplies, sending economic shockwaves worldwide.

The challenges are vast, the risks high, and the estimated cleanup cost, a staggering \$20 billion. Yet, despite setbacks, UNDP and its partners have pressed on, fueled by their shared commitment to prevent this disaster. This is their story of resilience and determination, a testament to the UN's role in safeguarding our interconnected world and vulnerable communities.

That is the UN at its best. An actor of first and last resort. Preventing catastrophe. Courageous and committed. Coordinated and collaborative. Taking a local action to deliver global impact. And it is UNDP that sits at the heart of the effort, utilizing its skills, will, and, yes Excellencies, its core funding in addition to funds earmarked for this specific project!

Thank you UNDP. Thanks to your staff and contractors who are working long hours to get the job done. I wish you every success for all our sakes.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates, Our responsibility is to enable these agencies to do even more of the same. A key lesson we should surely have learned in the past decade and a half, since at least the 2008 global financial crisis, is that we need to adapt to delivering development in the midst of recurring waves of global or regional crises. This is the new norm, and it's a dynamic we have to become adept at navigating.

States are having a tough time. Responding to their needs and priorities requires being able to assist in disaster response in one part of the country, while seeking to grow jobs and manufacturing in another. Our governance has to be up to snuff, our decisions enabling them to become nimble, responsive, competent and well resourced.

One of our assets is the reformed Resident Coordinator system. It has shown compelling success at the country level, as demonstrated by case studies from Kenya, Egypt, Pakistan, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We need to do more to strengthen the system and accelerate its full expression of a coordinated UN.

I believe that to further enhance its strategic and operational results, we need to introduce an additional aspect: convergence of financial, procedural, and operations standard operating procedures. There are stark differences between the agencies in how up to date and fit for purpose their systems are; some are decades-old.

The necessity for coordination and joint programming will be greatly strengthened if these systems are more aligned and even interoperable to some extent. This goes beyond the three agencies in this Executive Board.

The Joint Board model offers a potential platform for such convergence, encouraging agencies to collectively elevate their operational efficiency and effectiveness by consistently updating their systems and sharing progress.

In addition to the crucial role it is playing in collaborating with, and supporting, the Resident Coordinator system, perhaps the Development Cooperation Office can also give thought to systems convergence. Given the far reaching and cost-relevant impact of the Resident Coordinator system, I believe it would enhance the board's role to engage directly with the RCs. I encourage all of you to give further thought about the structural implications and opportunities in pursuing this idea.

Excellences, distinguished delegates

So many of the triumphs these agencies record are courtesy of the core funding that enables them to invest in areas of maximum cross-cutting impact. Unfortunately, their core funding is dwindling while the non-core grows.

They are busier than ever before but doing less that is truly paradigm shifting in the delivery of their mandates. As states, earmarked project funding is usually more tightly bound to our immediate priorities.

But our strategic goals, particularly in exploiting the synergies and opportunities to advance the SDGs require more programmatic, catalytic and innovative efforts. This is also the case in the ability of the agencies to deliver on member state priorities. In the long run, our inability to deliver at the strategic level will undermine all the other interests we are pursuing. I urge all states, programmatic and donor, to rethink the swing away from investing in the core.

I have previously referred to a convergence of systems. This is part of making the agencies fit for purpose in a future where they benefit from joint and blended programming, and in being able to work in the linkage between humanitarian response and development. Between armed conflict and the transition to peace and stability.

To have clearer insight into their fitness for purpose in working under conditions of crisis that also have an urgent need for livelihood support and development, we have organised two thematic interactive dialogues. First, with the UNDP Administrator on ‘Development Pathways out of Crises: Turning national aspirations into tangible results’ which will take place tomorrow, 6th June.

The second with the UNFPA Executive Director on ‘Demographic Resilience in a World of 8 Billion’, will be on the 8th June. At the UN we often call meetings “interactive” when in fact they are the opposite, but the agencies have worked hard to create an environment conducive for a free-flowing discussion. I look forward to your participation and your insights.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates

As we prepare for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable development in July, the SDG Summit in September and the Summit of the Future next year, this session takes on special importance. It will be a driving force in rooting our political negotiations for the summits with the concrete work of the agencies.

As I look ahead to these important meetings, I cannot help but sympathize with the experts in the our delegations. They will wade through thousands of pages of documents, while undertaking multiple negotiations. To state the obvious: that immense river of reports clogging our emails is not real transparency. The vast majority of it will be unread, un-analysed, and out of mind.

Our duty to govern effectively requires us to lift our heads and see the forest from the trees. The truth is that it is deeply undermined by this growing mountain of paper we have demanded from the agencies over the years. The loud silence from many delegations during our consultations is very often a reflection of inundation not an unwillingness to engage.

With your leave, and collaboration, let us make an effort to bring some level of sanity back to our oversight function. One critical step is to have the agencies tasked with giving us digestible reports in line with identified board best practices. Another is to unleash the power of machine learning and large language models to enable experts to query multiple reports. In the coming days and weeks, we will be reaching out with concrete proposals, reflecting ongoing discussions, to find ways forward.

In conclusion, the week ahead may present challenges, but it is well within our reach to overcome them. I extend my best wishes to all, and I encourage delegations to maintain their constructive engagement on the agenda items. **Thank you.**