Remarks by Ms. Ruby Sandhu-Rojon

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Mr. President of the UNDP Executive Board,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Representatives of the Governments of Cote d’Ivoire, Eritrea, the Gambia, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and Seychelles,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to submit to this Second Regular session of the Joint UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board the Country Programme Documents for Côte d’Ivoire, Eritrea, The Gambia, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles, as well as the two-year extension for Malawi, for approval.

As per the regular practice, all Country Programmes have been formulated in close consultation with the partner Governments and a wide range of stakeholders, including UN sister agencies, multilateral and bilateral partners, civil society, and the private sector. The versions submitted to you also incorporate comments received from various Executive Board members, whom I thank for the diligence in reviewing the drafts.
The wide variety in development contexts in each of the six countries requires a tailored response from UNDP, which is evident from the various country programmes submitted to you today.

Given the large number of country programmes submitted, and building on your earlier review of these programmes, please allow me to focus in this statement on the common denominators. In doing so, I will provide a succinct overview of the opportunities and challenges in Africa and UNDP’s contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the achievement of the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

In terms of SDG focus, all of the Africa country programmes presented today – despite their very different country contexts – have prioritized Goal 1 on poverty. Most have also prioritized Goals 10 and 16 on reducing inequalities, and peace, justice and strong institutions, respectively. The next-most popular Goals in the programmes presented include Goal 5 on gender equality; Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth; and Goal 13 on climate action.

These SDG commonalities underscore first that, while high economic growth is a foundation for development, for growth to be shared investments need to be made in skills development, equal access to resources such as land, energy and finance, as well as social protection.

We recognize that to achieve this goal, attention will have to be paid to the particular challenges faced by women at many levels. As we have indicated in our recently launched Africa Human Development Report, far too many African women are trapped at the lower end of the spectrum of economic opportunities, which often
perpetuates the same socio-economic status for their own families. A key message of the report is that giving more attention to gender equality can be an important and long overdue stimulus to more inclusive human development and economic growth for an entire continent. If 50 per cent of the population, that is, women and girls, are not benefitting equally from the policies and programmes, then these cannot be considered a success.

Where possible and appropriate, the policy directives provided in the report have already been translated in the six country programmes and we will follow through on this during the implementation. In particular, you will have found the following recommendations embedded in the country programmes: 1) using plans and budgets to prioritize gender equality; 2) strengthening adaptive policies and institutional capacities; and 3) adding value to data for improved decision-making.

We also recognize the importance of the significant youth demographic in Africa and its potential in the realization of this goal despite the challenges of maximizing benefits from this critical social capital by for example, adequately investing in youth empowerment and development.

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The SDG analysis of these programmes also reveals the high dependence of many African economies at large – as well as important segments of the population, in particular the vulnerable – on environmental services, from minerals to biodiversity. Hence, inclusive development and climate change adaptation and mitigation go hand in hand. An inclusive growth path will have to be accompanied by investments in sustainable natural resource management and disaster risk management to build
resilience. In essence tying together the social, economic and environmental development spheres.

A strong focus on Goal 16 also tells us that underlying the efforts of inclusive and sustainable growth in each programme is the need for responsive and accountable governance and sound social contracts to reinforce peace, stability, and hence create an environment in which development can take place in an inclusive manner.

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In summary, the country programmes presented today are founded on issues-based approaches which simultaneously promote inclusive prosperity, equitable and sustainable management of natural resources, and which are underpinned by governance systems that guarantee peace, stability, and social cohesion. This is the most effective strategy for reducing poverty, improving living conditions and creating greater opportunities for all people.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Board for their support to the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and to all programme countries under the Bureau’s responsibility.

I thank you for your attention.