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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

**Speech by Mr. Carlos Lopes, UN Assistant Secretary-General,
UNITAR Executive Director**

Open Dialogue with Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano of Mexico on
Climate Change Diplomacy / from Cancun to Durban

Geneva, Switzerland, Palais des Nations, Room XVI,
15:00 to 16:30, 28 February 2011

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you all for being here at this important meeting that is organised thanks to the help and support of the Permanent Mission of Mexico. I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce Her Excellency, Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, the Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico and the President of the UN Conference on Climate Change COP16.

Ambassador Espinosa led Parties at the United Nations climate change negotiations in Cancun last December to a broad and balanced package of decisions that lays the foundations to slow the current pace of human-induced climate change.

Her Excellency has previously served as the ambassador to Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Slovakia. Ambassador Espinosa is no stranger to Switzerland, having spent some time here during her career in the Foreign Service, but also having studied at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies here in Geneva.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change is, in the words of UN SG Ban Ki-moon, *a defining challenge of our time*, affecting in particular those who are already the most vulnerable, economically and socially. We have seen the impacts of extreme weather events, such as the last year's catastrophic flooding in Pakistan, floods and landslides in China and North Korea, continued severe droughts in sub-Saharan Africa. This list can go on.

The social and economic impacts of these extreme weather events highlight more clearly than ever the need for urgent action to improve our understanding and forecasting of the climate system, and to curb our global greenhouse gas emissions. We now speak of the 50-50-50 dilemma, with the world population forecast to increase by 50% by 2050. This is also the year by which our global emissions should be reduced by at least 50% in order to keep global temperatures under a 2 degrees Celsius rise, while simultaneously ensuring equitable human development.



A global plan of action to reach the 50 % reduction target is not easy to define and implement. In trying to find a comprehensive solution, we face in particular challenges related to the achievement of a post-Kyoto international agreement, including differentiated responsibilities of the parties involved. The challenge of addressing climate change has therefore become intensely political, economical and a question of sustainable development.

As the head of an agency engaged in range of activities to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to address the challenges of our times, the topic of capacity development in developing countries to address climate change is particularly close to my heart. From what we hear from our partners in the South a quantum jump of commitment by all sides is needed to address this challenge. As a contribution to the collective efforts of the UN system to provide support for capacity development, UNITAR is hosting UN CC:Learn, a partnership of 23 UN agencies, to deliver effective climate change learning through a One UN approach. One of the objectives of the initiative is to support countries in taking a strategic approach to human resource and skills development.

In whatever action taken, whether in the area of policy making or capacity development, we must find solutions which engage the entire world community, and which are fair and just to both, future and current generations.

After Copenhagen, it seemed that any global consensus was far off, suffocated by political agendas. Cancun was therefore a steep challenge for all those involved. The Mexican Presidency, however, took on this challenge with strength and prowess, with the objective of working with all Parties, in both formal and informal consultations, to achieve transparent and open dialogue in an environment conducive to inclusive and progressive negotiation. As a result of these efforts led by Ambassador Espinosa, the Conference of the Parties in Cancun was able to mark a defined change in the momentum of multilateral environmental diplomacy, and negotiators were able to agree upon a balanced set of agreements. These agreements represent substantive steps forward in tackling global climate change.

On the last evening of negotiations in Cancun, Ambassador Espinosa was greeted on stage by a standing ovation of lively applause. This welcome clearly showed the conference's appreciation of her and her team's efforts to conduct the conference in such a positive and refreshing manner. The conference went on to adopt decisions under both negotiating tracks, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and was concluded at around 6am on the morning of Saturday 11th December.

The Cancun agreements marked significant achievements in the areas of climate finance, technology transfer, the reduction of emissions through reduced land degradation and forestry, adaptation and global mitigation commitments.



This however did not mark the end of Ambassador Espinosa's commitment to the climate change negotiation process; she continues to work closely with Parties to ensure that progress is sustained and continued throughout 2011, from Cancun to Durban, where COP17 will be held this December.

As we speak, my colleagues from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) are in Pretoria, South Africa, supporting South African preparations for their prospective Presidency of the Conferences on climate change. UNITAR was also invited by the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Ms. Christiana Figueres, to work in Cancun to assist and support presiding officers in their common task of finding consensus amongst the often highly polarized Party positions. Like Ambassador Espinosa, UNITAR remains committed to ensuring that the progress made in Cancun is sustained throughout 2011, in the run-up to and at COP17.

Given the momentum that the negotiation process in 2011 has inherited from the success of Cancun, COP17 in Durban could become a key milestone in the negotiation process. I am therefore delighted to welcome Her Excellency Ambassador Espinosa, to share with us her thoughts and experiences on what was achieved in Cancun, and what action must now be taken to sustain its success.

Without further ado, I would like to express my thanks to The Permanent Mission of Mexico in Geneva, and to warmly welcome Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, who I now kindly invite to take the floor.