

Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst
Head of the Delegation of the European Union

**Signature of the "Support to Reform and Environmental Governance
(StREG) Programme"**

Ministry of Environment – Thursday 31 May 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

H.E. Minister Nazem el-Khoury,
Dr Suhail Bauji, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers,
Mr. Nabil el Jisr, President of the Council for Development and Reconstruction,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Environment... I often hear that Lebanon has more pressing problems to deal with. Well, over the last two decades, environmental degradation has emerged as one of the key challenges for Lebanon's economic and social development. Urgent attention, serious commitment and political will are needed. Air toxicity, pollution of ground water and rivers, illegal landfills and release of untreated wastewater in the sea are just some aspects of this challenge affecting all economic sectors, livelihoods, food, health, tourism, etc.

Not only does the cost of environmental degradation exceed an estimated 800 million Euros/year for Lebanon, the cost of squandering natural resources and of missed economic opportunities is also substantial.

The recent advancements Lebanon made in saving the environment are significant and show the willingness to move towards a formula in which polluters are obliged to factor in the cost of their environmental impact. I congratulate Minister El Khoury on the recent decrees passed requiring the carrying out of environmental impact assessments and the creation of an environmental prosecutor.

With an 8 million euro support from the European Union, the goal of the StREG programme is to give further impetus to improving environmental governance. Why? Because we believe that a strong environmental legal framework is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

However, this is not sufficient. This programme is therefore part of a broader environmental package for Lebanon which will include adaptation and mitigation measures on climate change and support to the shift towards a green economy, one of the priorities of this Government.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know the Rio+20 Conference will take place in June. One of the key outcomes the EU is proposing for Rio is the creation of an international agency to promote environmental governance.

We hope the Government of Lebanon will support the European Union's position in this regard. In any case, the StREG is fully in line with this proposal, as it contributes to the much needed institution building of environmental authorities.

I thank the Government of Lebanon and in particular the Minister for continuing to share their commitment to seriously address environmental degradation.

Thank you.