Meeting on Sharing of Best Practices and Innovation in Governance and Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies,
Distinguished experts and colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I wish to thank you for taking part in the Meeting on Sharing of Best Practices and Innovation in Governance and Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region. I also wish to thank our host, the Government of Tunisia, and in particular His Excellency Mr. Zouhaier M'dhaffar, Minister Delegated to the Prime Minister’s Office in Charge of Civil Service and Administrative Development for giving us the opportunity to hold our meeting in this beautiful country and for the contribution provided to this event. In addition, I wish to thank His Excellency Mr. Mario Baccini for honouring us with his presence today and the Government of Italy for providing generous support to the implementation of the Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region. My thanks also go to Mr. Flamment, President of Formez- Training and Study Centre, who has been working with us in the past years on fostering the exchange of innovation in the Mediterranean region, as well as Mr. Pennella, Director of the Centre for Administrative Innovation in the Mediterranean region, which is jointly run by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Formez. Finally, let me thank Mr. Francis Du Bois, Resident Representative of the UNDP
office of Tunisia, for being here today and for the support provided by his office.

I am very pleased to have with us distinguished personalities, experts, and colleagues who will present and discuss significant innovations in public administration in their respective countries, and debate how these innovations and ideas can be adapted to other countries of the region. As you know, this Meeting is one of the key activities of the United Nations Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Euro-Mediterranean Region (http://www.unpan.org/innovmed). The Programme is implemented by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), in collaboration with Formez – Training and Study Centre based in Naples (Italy). This collaboration is channelled through our common Centre on Administrative Innovation in the Mediterranean Region -CAIMED. As mentioned earlier, the Programme is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Italy.

The objective of the United Nations Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Euro-Mediterranean region is to contribute to the improvement of governance systems in Northern Africa, and selected countries of the Middle East and the Balkan region, with a view to
enhancing prosperity and development. In particular, the Programme aims at reinforcing the capacity of national governments, in terms of institutions, human resources, technological adequacy and financial management, to better cope with emerging national, regional and international challenges, as well as to respond more effectively to citizens’ demands and needs. It is intended to reinforce the capacity of governments and regional institutions to share information, knowledge and successful practices in public administration innovation through the establishment of a Network of Innovators in Governance in the Mediterranean region - a special session will be devoted to this issue on the last day of this meeting–, specific conferences and meetings, and an on-line portal accessible to all citizens across the Mediterranean countries; as well as assist selected governments of the region to implement best practices and innovative experiences through pilot projects.

I wish to mention that sharing innovations in public administration and making them available through the United Nations Global On-line Network on Public Administration -UNPAN - is a way to provide countries, who are interested in innovation, with a number of concrete alternatives and reform options. By encouraging the sharing of knowledge and successful practices, partner countries can benefit from experiences and lessons learned in other areas of the region and develop cooperation
models aimed at stimulating vertical (North-South) as well as horizontal (South-South) collaboration. Focusing on successful practices rather than on failures can provide positive incentives for reform efforts and encourage a constructive outlook on development. It affords the opportunity to shift our attention from “what” public administration and the State should do to “how” it should do it, i.e. how it should tackle the many challenges it is presented with on a daily basis. Finally, innovation in the public sector should not be considered as a fashion or a “special benefit” of countries with developed administrative systems. It is indeed a necessity for the continuous improvement of the development process and a basic pre-requisite to enable governments to adequately respond to the evolving demands of citizens and to the complexities of contemporary societies.

In fact, given the many challenges governments around the world face today, public administration cannot remain its old self. It needs to be revitalized, to become more proactive, more efficient, more accountable, and especially more service-oriented. Public administration needs to be transformed into a responsive instrument to meet the needs of all citizens, including the poor, and to be accountable to the most vulnerable populations. To accomplish this transformation, public administration needs to innovate its organizational structure, its practices, its capacities, and how it mobilizes, deploys and utilizes the human, material,
information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people. Globalization also requires that states adapt to new and changing local, national and international forces. In this respect, public sector reform is one of the most important ingredients in reinvigorating the economy and in allowing countries to integrate into the global economy.

While the challenges are many, so are the opportunities for public administration. It has been gradually recognized that public administration has a crucial role to play in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, notably, maintenance of peace and security, poverty eradication, upholding human rights and democratic ethos, making globalization work for all, protecting the vulnerable and meeting the special needs of Africa. The myth that markets and the private sector alone can accelerate development, spearhead growth, eliminate inequalities and make life better for all has been replaced by bitter disappointment, so has the myth that the State alone can be the engine of growth and development. Both the State and market have a fundamental role to play in the development process, and partnerships between the State, private sector and civil society are greatly needed in this respect.

On the positive side, I wish to underscore that as part of this great movement to revitalize public administration, we see all over the world,
innovation and experimentation sprouting in central government, local
government and individual agencies, particularly in the area of service
delivery. As the United Nations Public Service Awards has shown, there
is great capacity in all corners of the globe to reinvent Government and to
implement innovative measures in various fields of the public sector.
What is more, both developed and developing countries can benefit from
pioneering initiatives in innovating public service delivery and in
administrative innovation. For example, the SAC model (services to
citizens) which originated in Brazil has now been adopted in Portugal and
other Lusophone countries. This proves that the exchange of information
on innovation in public administration is a powerful tool to inspire
governments in their reform process, and thus to improve the quality of a
democracy, and that innovations can benefit any country. The exchange
and sharing of these innovative experiences create a body of “new
knowledge” which can be accessed by public administrations all over the
world.

As you well know, knowledge acquisition is very important in the era of
Information Technology and rapid change. For that reason, it is not
sufficient any longer to rely on one’s own local expertise, but knowledge
may be acquired through exchange of information on successful practices,
or even failures, and experiences in general that may facilitate reform in
other countries. Learning from other developing countries or developed
countries can save time, inspire new reforms, and in some cases help countries to leapfrog stages of development. In other words, sharing successful practices is relevant not so much in the sense that countries can transfer an existing model from another country into their own administrative system, but rather that they can adapt elements of reforms that are taking place in other contexts to their internal circumstances, and most importantly that this process can serve as an incentive to jump start other similar reforms.

Within this context, it should be mentioned that the Mediterranean countries, including the countries from Northern Africa, the Middle East and the Balkan region, have an impressive heritage in terms of capacity to acquire and produce knowledge, to creatively adapt and interact with other cultures, and to integrate sources of knowledge. The challenge is how to maximize the benefits of this heritage and capitalize on existing knowledge by creating knowledge networks and promoting a favourable environment for innovation in governance and public administration.

This Meeting is a unique opportunity to share knowledge on innovations in the Mediterranean region and to discuss a number of issues related to the policies and processes adopted in implementing the innovations at hand. It is also critical since one of its objectives, and more in general one of the objectives of the Programme for Innovation in Public
Administration in the Mediterranean Region, is to assist interested Governments in the region to learn about some of the innovations that will be presented here today and see whether they are suitable to their national context. In order to facilitate the adaptation of innovations in the region, we just held a two-days meeting which was intended to explore and agree on methodologies and approaches to transfer best practices.

The experts tried to provide answers to the following questions:

- What constitutes a “best practice” in public administration?
- Why should governments search for innovations in public administration?
- What is involved in the process of innovation in public administration?
- What are the factors that facilitate or hinder innovation in public administration (enabling environment)?
- Describe what governments and other stakeholders should do to create an enabling environment for innovation in public administration?

**Transferability of “best practices”**

- What are the characteristics and factors that make an innovation transferable from one context to another?
- Of all the constituting elements of a “best practice” or of an innovation what should be transferred?
- What should be done to enhance the transferability of “best practices”?

**Endogenous capacity to absorb and implement a “best practice”**

- Describe the various elements of endogenous capacity that enable the effective adaptation and implementation of a “best practice”.
- What are the elements of a successful adaptation plan?
• How can sustainability of a “best practice” be ensured?

• Describe what should be done to build endogenous capacity for adaptation, implementation and evaluation of a “best practice”.

**Approaches and methodologies for the adaptation of “best practices”**

• What are the various approaches and methodologies that can be used to adapt “best practices” effectively?

• Assess the strength and weaknesses of each one of these approaches and methodologies?

• Of all the approaches and methodologies you have described which ones would you recommend in which context?

The results of the discussion has provided us with important insight on how to develop further the programme of administrative innovation in the Mediterranean region. Some possible steps which I would like you to consider and evaluate may be:

• Better collect, describe and benchmark successful practices in the region and include this information in easy accessible data bases

• Create a network of innovators, namely of individuals who either were involved in developing innovations or who have studied and documented the same

• Establish within this network “communities of practice” bringing together practitioners and innovators linked by specific knowledge of specialized areas of public administration
• Promote and institutionalize exchanges, such as peer-to-peer exchanges, bringing together teams or institutions which have developed innovations and those which are interested in transferring them and adapting them to their national or sub-national context.

I am sure that this Meeting will provide us with an incredible opportunity to share and learn about what each country in the region is doing in terms of innovation in public administration will chart out a strategy for action in this area for the Mediterranean region. I therefore look forward to a very fruitful and constructive meeting and wish you a pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Tunis.