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Transition to ‘green economy’ must aim at poverty eradication – UN official



4 March 2011 – A senior United Nations official today cautioned that the failure to tackle poverty can only lead to rising social tensions, ecological pressures and economic crisis, stressing the importance of a transition to a “green economy” that fosters sustainable development and poverty eradication.

“The sad truth is that despite two centuries of spectacular growth on our planet, we have failed to eradicate the scourge of poverty,” Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, told a news conference in New York, as preparations continue for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012.

A preparatory meeting for the Conference will be held in New York on Monday and Tuesday.

“If we continue on our current path, we will bequeath material and environmental poverty, not prosperity, to our children and grandchildren,” said Mr. Sha, who is also the Secretary-General of the Conference, which has been dubbed ‘Rio 2012.’

He noted that in Rio, countries can agree on a range of smart policies that are needed to green the economy, promote jobs, advance clean energy and clean water, and ensure a more sustainable and fairer use of resources. Those aims are interrelated and must therefore be addressed in an “integrated manner” to result in sustainable development.

“Rio 2012 will be one of the most important events in the coming decade. It is a response to the rude wake-up call received in 2008... first the food and energy crises... then the financial collapse... and then the prolonged global recession and mounting social tensions,” Mr. Sha said.

The Conference is intended to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development, assess progress and gaps in implementation of agreed commitments, and address new and emerging challenges.

Its two themes are “a green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication” and “institutional framework for sustainable development.”

Ambassador Charles Thembani Ntwaagae of Botswana, a member of the preparatory committee for the Conference, said expectations are that Rio 2012 will produce a document that will be “ambitious and action-oriented.”

“It should be an outcome document that spells out what has to be done to improve the lives of the poorest people, particularly in the developing world,” Mr. Ntwaagae told correspondents.

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