

Opening speech by Tuula Yrjölä, Ambassador of Finland



Your Excellencies, the Governor of Alexandria, Vice President of the Cairo University, Dr. Kamel, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to attend the opening of the **National Workshop on Green Customs Initiative, managed by the Basel Convention Regional Centre**. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish Embassy in Egypt are proud partners of this important project, which supports environmentally sustainable development in the region.

Our countries have a long history of partnership. Finland supports Egypt's development through bilateral capacity building projects, as well as through international organizations such as the Basel Convention Regional Centre.

**The environment** is a priority sector for Finnish support in Egypt, as well as in the wider context of Finnish development policy. Over the years the Government of Finland has supported several environmental projects in Egypt. Some of these projects have been directed to Northern Egypt, with the residents of Alexandria and the neighboring municipalities as the principal beneficiaries.

Finland has extensive experience in planning and executing systematic **hazardous waste management and policy**. We highly appreciate the work of the Basel Convention Regional Centre, whose expertise is highly valuable both on a national and regional level. The Government of Finland had the opportunity to support the BCRC's work on the earlier phase of this project through the United Nations Environmental Program UNEP, for a total amount of 1 MEUR.

The results were promising and encouraged us to extend our support to the BCRC on the second phase, where the special focus is on improving the environmentally safe management and the control of trans-boundary movements of hazardous wastes in the Arab countries.

We hope that our support enables the BCRC to become a sustainable regional knowledge and service center on hazardous waste issues for the Arab countries. It is also important to consolidate the achievements of the first phase.

**Egypt** has undergone turbulent times during the past two and a half years. We are glad that this project has sustained its momentum, and that the implementation phase is now ready to start. This is a clear sign of dedicated partnership from all the parties involved. It showcases the strength of true cooperation.

I would like express our gratitude to **Director Dr. Mostafa Kamel**, who has been a key person in keeping this project on-going. Dr. Kamel's personal input and interest have ensured a strong base for the implementation of the project.

Another partner organization and a key person in our common project, whose input I would like to highlight, are the UNDP and especially **Mr. Mohammed Bayoumi**, who has significantly contributed by bringing in the expertise of the UNDP and assisting on the various procedures.

I want to thank the **Governor of Alexandria, General Tarek Mahdy**, for his support to the project, and for finding the time to attend today's opening ceremony himself.

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I had the honor to present my **Letter of Credentials** in Cairo yesterday to Interim President Adly Mansour. Having arrived in Egypt one and a half months ago, today's trip to Alexandria is my first one – both outside of Cairo, and to this beautiful city itself. I look forward to visiting Alexandria again, and to learning about the fascinating history and culture of this city. As importantly, I look forward to learning more about the future prospects of this dynamic city. I believe that there are great opportunities for cooperation between Finland and Alexandria and the Northern coastal area of Egypt.

Finally, I should add that **Finland's new development policy program** was published early this year. It highlights a results-based approach – meaning, that a project should have clear targets and to proceed toward these targets with determination. We hope to see such dynamism on this project as well.

I personally look forward to following how the project proceeds. I hope that the participants of this Workshop will make full use of the experience and know-how gained during the following days.

I wish all success for the BCRC's future operations.