

**Opening Remarks**  
**At the**  
**Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Urban Transport:**  
**Modernizing and ‘Greening’ Taxi Fleets in Latin American Cities**

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Mr. Sergio Besserman Vianna, President, Rio de Janeiro Chamber for Sustainable  
Development and Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro on ‘Rio+20’,  
Mr. Alexandre Sansao, Transport Secretary of Rio de Janeiro Municipality,  
Mr. Seung Hyun Lee, Overseas Project Department at Korea Energy Management  
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Distinguished Experts and Colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and its Division for Sustainable Development, and as a co-organizer of this event, I am indeed pleased to attend this opening session and to welcome you all at this *Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Urban Transport: Modernizing and ‘Greening’ Taxi Fleets in Latin American Cities*.

Mr. Sha Zukang, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and Mr. Tariq Banuri, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development at DESA, convey their warmest greetings and their best wishes for a productive exchange of information and experiences in the area of regulating and modernizing urban taxi fleets.

Taxis play an important role in urban transport systems. Commercial taxis are typically available 24 hours per day to provide point-to-point or door-to-door transportation services. Taxis are used by persons who do not have or do not wish to use their own car, as well as by the elderly and disabled persons, unable to use other public transportation modes.

The taxi industry has been constantly growing over the past two decades, in particular in cities with rapid growth of population and economic activity, including in many of the metropolitan cities and commercial centers in the Latin American region.

The taxi service industry is a major contributor to national economies by creating job opportunities and tax revenues for local authorities. In Europe, more than one million taxis exist which represent 10-20 per cent of urban traffic in major cities. Many of the

Latin American cities are also serviced by large taxi fleets, often comprising more than 10,000 company-owned and individually-owned vehicles.

Taxis have the ability to substitute private vehicle ownership. However, taxis are also driven practically all the time which can give rise to environmental concerns. In many cities, taxis drive on average more than 50,000 miles (80,000 kilometers) per year mostly in inner-city areas. Inefficient use of fuels in taxis can have a significant negative impact on the urban environment and local living conditions through air and noise pollution.

This Expert Group Meeting seeks to support the on-going efforts in the Latin American region to develop more sustainable urban transport schemes. Specifically, the meeting aims to:

- identify and discuss sustainable development issues related to taxi systems, including economic, social and environmental aspects;
- consider local transport policies that can enhance investment, employment and income generation;
- discuss opportunities for improving the sustainability of existing taxi schemes and for mitigating environmental impacts, including on urban air quality and greenhouse gas emissions;
- provide proposals for improved regulatory and legislative measures;
- create an expanded informal consultative network, bridging the gaps between policy-making, science, academia, and the private-sector;
- identify possible future projects and partnerships for international cooperation.

As the co-organizers of this Expert Group Meeting we are pleased to provide a platform for an exchange of experiences and an informed debate on these and on other questions.

Sustainable development requires a holistic perspective and an inclusive decision making process that involves government and business leaders, as well as other stakeholders. I am indeed pleased to see that this meeting also brings together experts from academic institutions, civil society and non-governmental groups.

In many cities throughout Latin America regulations pertaining to taxis and taxi fleets are currently under review. Therefore, this meeting seems quite timely and it may offer an opportunity to contribute to these policy making processes.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank our co-organizing local hosts and partners, the COPPE Transport Engineering Programme of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and in particular Professor Ronaldo Balassiano and his team, for their very effective professional collaboration and support.

We are also very grateful for the support and the hospitality extended to us by the City Government of Rio de Janeiro. As you know, the city of Rio de Janeiro hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, better known as the 'Earth Summit', back in 1992.

Next year, on the twentieth anniversary of this landmark conference, Rio will again host a high-level United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the 'Rio+20' Conference, which will be held here in early June 2012.

As agreed by the United Nations General Assembly, the Conference will focus on two main themes. One of the main themes will be the 'Green Economy in the context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development'.

A so-called 'green economy' will probably only be achievable with 'greener' and more sustainable transport systems. Hence, the discussions at this meeting, and the proceedings and the recommendations that come from you, could eventually also contribute to and inform the up-coming 'Rio+20' debate, especially with regard to good urban transport and taxi regulation policies.

I sincerely thank Mr. Sergio Besserman Viana and Mr. Alexandre Sansao for setting time aside in spite of their busy schedules to be with us here this morning.

On behalf of the co-organizers, I would also like to express our sincere appreciation of the generous financial and technical support provided to us by the Government of the Republic of Korea, through the Ministry of Knowledge Economy (MKE), the Korea Energy Management Corporation (KEMCO), the Korea Energy Economics Institute (KEEI) and the Korea Transport Institute (KoTI). Without this generous project support, this event would certainly not have been realized.

I wish all of you an interesting meeting.

Thanks you very much for your kind attention.