DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE ON
“POVERTY IN MONGOLIA: LOOKING BEYOND THE NUMBERS”

18 December 2012, Ulaanbaatar Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

Speech by Ms. Sezin Sinanoglu, UNDP Resident Representative

Mr. MENDSAIKHAN, Chairman, National Statistics Organisation

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to the second Dialogue in our Development Dialogue series for 2012-13. As many of you who attended the inaugural dialogue earlier this month would be aware, these Dialogues aim to contribute to a richer and more rounded process for policy-making in Mongolia by initiating discussions among government, development partners, and civil society on key development issues; exchanging ideas and experiences; and in the process generating new ideas and fresh perspectives.

And no issue is more important in Mongolia today than poverty reduction. In spite of rapid economic growth in recent years we are still witnessing stubborn and high level of poverty, high unemployment, growing income inequality especially in urban areas, and wide regional disparities.

Why is this so? Poverty is not an ‘invisible’ issue in Mongolia. There is considerable recognition and also action by the Government, the civil society and international community. But are we missing something? Are we doing the right thing? What can we do better and differently, to make a difference? These are some of the questions motivating today’s Dialogue and we hope that the discussions that will follow the presentations will help shed some light on these questions.

Poverty is a complex issue. We could see how complex it is from how long it took to settle differences around poverty numbers rates. We’re very happy that today we have a single poverty estimate and can collectively focus our energies on reducing it. I’d like to thank NSO and the World Bank for their very constructive cooperation in that regard.

But of course poverty is not only numbers, and it is not only income. As we all recognize it is deprivation in overall well-being. It comprises many dimensions such as low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and
opportunity to better one’s life. It is a reality that prevents people from exercising their most basic human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This begs the question: does Mongolia have a strategy that looks at poverty from all these various dimensions? Some of these are captured in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but since the programmes to address different dimensions, and the associated funding, are located within line ministries, a coordinated strategy linking these dimensions may be needed.

No one can say there has been no action on reducing poverty in Mongolia. On the contrary, since the 1990s numerous projects and programmes have been implemented to address the various dimensions of poverty. Whether it is alternative livelihoods, or social protection schemes, or microfinance, or housing - you name it, it has been done. But have these programmes been evaluated to assess their effectiveness? Before we develop a strategy to reduce poverty we need to develop an understanding of what works and what doesn’t.

I hope today’s discussions will spark some discussion on these issues.

Finally, let me quote from the what the Special Rapporteur on Poverty recently said at the press conference she held at the end of her mission:

“I commend the steps already taken by the new Government to tackle poverty and inequality; increase employment generation and improve the effectiveness of poverty reduction measures. The Government has been in office for a relatively short period of time, and there are many challenges that they will need to overcome. They must show their political will with results." The result we are all looking for is a decline in poverty and for that to be sustained over the long term.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding I would like to thank the British Embassy in Mongolia for supporting this Dialogue series. A special word of gratitude is to the National Statistical Organisation which is the national partner for the second Dialogue as well as a very valuable partner to UNDP and the UN on a number of other initiatives, most recently the launch of the Poverty Maps for Mongolia. I would like to acknowledge their leadership in the area of Poverty and indicate our continued interest to cooperate with them.
I am also thankful to our two key presenters – Mr. Erdenesuren, Vice Chairman of National Statistical Organisation, and Mr. Tamir, Vice Minister of Population Development and Social Protection for their contributions to this Dialogue.

Poverty reduction is a slow and arduous task. It requires consistent and joint effort of all concerned partners. I hope the rich discussions following the presentations today will generate ideas on what can be done to reduce poverty in Mongolia speedily and how all of us can contribute to this effort.

Thank you.