STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF SIGNING THE UNDP/DANA COST SHARING AGREEMENT TO SUPPORT THE ASIATIC CHEETAH

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Distinguished members of Dana’s Board of Directors,
Distinguished Deputies and Managers of Dana,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- A very warm welcome to you all.
- We’re delighted to be able to host you in this month of spiritual reflection, personal renewal, and spiritual practice.
- It is indeed very opportune to use this time to thank our valued private sector partner, Dana Insurance, for doing what is right and serving as a national conservation champion.
- Today is an important day for a beautiful creature with whom we share this country.
- By signing today’s agreement with DANA, we have gathered here to mark yet another milestone in the implementation of the “Conservation of the Asiatic cheetah Project (CACP)”.
- So let me start by saying a few words about our Cheetah project – and end by speaking of the importance that we attach to our partnership with DoE and DANA.
• This long-standing project started implementation in 2001. Since then it has been one of DoE’s and UNDP’s most impressive public-awareness-raising and partnership stories.

• Back in those days, the pressures of modernization, encroaching roads, human settlements and livestock, along with illegal shooting by poachers, was reducing the number of Asiatic Cheetah, in Iran, to dangerously low levels. Some citizens of Iran actually thought that these beautiful animals had gone extinct.

• But over the past decade-and-a-half, we have contributed to reversing the process of extinction for this iconic cat species in Iran, through a number of interventions. These include:
  o local community partnership,
  o support to game guards,
  o strengthening Iran’s protected areas
  o and research.

• Our conservation strategy has been science-based.

• The project has been underpinned by extensive partnership-building. Prominent international wildlife and cat conservation organizations include the *Wildlife Conservation Society, IUCN’s Cat Specialist Group* and *Panthera*.

• These partners have been the source of many innovative ideas in conservation, including new ways of sustainably managing Iran’s reserves and introducing new protocols to ungulate census.

• At the national level, the project has brought together many wildlife enthusiasts in the form of registered NGOs who – to this day – are going from strength to strength in safeguarding Iran’s biodiversity.
• NGOs such as the **Asiatic Cheetah Society**, the **Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation**, and **Boumpajohan** are but a few members of the civil society that spring to mind.

• Future conservation efforts in Iran hinge on the continued involvement and increased capacities of these Iranian conservation activists.

• UNDP is delighted to have offered the opportunity of engagement to this core of energetic, young “force-for-the-good” through its mainstream projects under the Global Environment Facility – as well as through the GEF Small Grants Programme.

• Much of today’s implementation work is now being carried out in Yazd, Semnan and North Khorasan provinces through DoE’s provincial offices.

• So, in summary, let me confidently say that compared with the early days of project implementation, the threats to cheetah and prey have diminished in both scale and nature.

• However, physical protection against mainly the poaching of cheetah prey and overgrazing is still necessary.

• And herein lies the contribution of our most important partners – the 126 DOE game guards across 10 cheetah habitats. These are the Iranians who are doing most to save the Asiatic Cheetahs.

• And this is where **Dana Insurance’s** contribution benefits us so immensely.

• I cannot stress too strongly how the collective impact of Dana’s contribution has raised morale among the Asiatic Cheetah Game Guards who operate at the sharp end – in all weather conditions – and often facing severe dangers.
• The financial – and psychological – security which DANA’s contribution provides to these Game Guards greatly strengthens their hands.

• Not surprisingly, I hear there are many more game guard job applicants as a result of DANA’s generous contribution.

• There are a few forms of insurance coverage that benefit these Game Guards and their families. In my speech in December 2014, and in the presence of Mr. Sadegh, and with our Dana colleagues, I cited the various forms of this coverage.

• Today, however, we’re signing an agreement that will activate another form of coverage provided by Dana – one which contributes directly to mitigating cheetah threats. And one that provides much needed co-funding for the implementation of critical project workplan activities.

• I’m referring to the DANA insurance coverage of up to 500 million Rials for a maximum of 5 cheetah kills per year due to road accidents, predation by herder dogs – or other causes. In such situations, the proceeds will be used by the Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP) to try to fix the threat which caused the cheetah’s death in the first place.

• Ladies and Gentlemen, the latest two cheetah kills took place along the Tehran-Mashhad expressway where a mother and a cub collided with oncoming traffic.

• DANA’s contribution which we will now receive through signing this agreement has already been committed to the project by Mr. Jowkar, our energetic and extremely committed project manager.

• The money has already funded a comprehensive study based on the latest road ecology science, where a 12-km traffic-accident-hotspot has been identified to the north east of Touran Protected Area.
• This deadly traffic corridor has been extensively studied through the application of leading-edge software.

• Early action is now being taken through the imminent erection of 10 large traffic sign posts will along this corridor in coordination with the Traffic Police.

• Our partnership stories underline the fact that conservation is only sustainable if led and truly owned by local and national champions.

• Dana Insurance Corporation is one of these champions.

• Once again thank you Dr. Sadegh and DANA colleagues for your generous contribution, for your vision, and for helping to save our partners on this planet – the Asiatic Cheetah.

• *Kheily motasherakam.*