

Opening statement

by

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Europe**

At the

**International Forum «Ensuring Children's Rights to a Healthy
Environment»» dedicated to the World Children's Day**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to express my gratitude to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Zamin Foundation, Her Excellency Ms. Ziroat Mirziyoyeva, for the opportunity to greet the participants of today's International Forum.

Young people across the Pan-European region are driving change for a sustainable future. UNECE aims to strengthen its partnership with young people who often stand at the forefront in the fight against climate change and inequalities. Young agents for change deserve a voice in the multilateral discussions that will impact their future and the future of our planet.

UNECE is privileged to **service a number of policy and legally binding instruments that aim to strengthen Children's Rights to a Healthy Environment.**

In this context, in January 2023, UNECE is planning to hold a **Youth Dialogue** which will strengthen young people's capacity to engage in UNECE multilateral policy discussions and will give them a space to co-create innovative solutions to regional challenges. UNECE's work will benefit from the participants' inputs in multiple ways. UNECE's instruments and mechanisms will be more fit for purpose by better understanding the needs and aspirations of young people. They will foster UNECE's potential to be innovative, creative and fit for the future. Key messages of the youth dialogue will be presented at UNECE's 70th Session of the Commission, to be held in Geneva from 18 to 19 April 2023 and whose topic will be "*Digital and Green Transformations for Sustainable Development*".

Aarhus Convention is one of the main legally binding instruments hosted by UNECE that aim to strengthen Children's Rights to a Healthy Environment. Parties to the Convention, - in order to contribute to the protection of the

right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, - shall:

- guarantee to the public, including children and youth, the **rights of access to information and to justice**, and public participation in decision-making in environmental matters; and
- to promote **environmental education** and environmental awareness, which aim to strengthen public's capacity to exercise those rights.

In addition, since 2005, under the guidance of the Steering Committee, UNECE has been hosting a Ministerial process aiming to implement the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The process provides a platform for efficient cooperation between environment, education sectors and other relevant sectors and stakeholders.

The recently held Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, organized in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (5-7 October 2022, Nicosia, Cyprus), adopted the **new Implementation Framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD up to 2030 and the Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development**. These documents focus on the special role that education has to play in addressing the unprecedented challenges faced currently by our planet and all layers of our societies, including children and young people.

In the Statement, the Ministers acknowledged the importance of **empowering** marginalized and vulnerable populations, including girls and

women, **children**, persons with disabilities, refugees and persons affected by armed conflict, crises and disasters, by providing to them with adequate learning environments and opportunities, as well as resilient, healthy and sustainable settings and quality.

The Ministers emphasized the central role of youth as a catalyst for change to create a better and resilient future and considered the importance of actively empowering and engaging youth in formulating and implementing sustainable development policies and practices.

The Ministers acknowledged the **importance of establishing the UNECE ESD Youth Platform in the framework of the Steering Committee**, that would also provide an opportunity of raising public awareness for promoting and protecting the rights of young people, including children, and developing a youth and child-friendly environment around the world through dialogue.

I wish all of you a very productive conference.

Thank you.