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Statement

European Urban Forum

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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**Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic - Public Investment
Academy**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honor to welcome you on behalf of UNECE to the European Urban Forum.

I would like to thank Her Excellency Minister Šlechtová and the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic for organizing this important forum here in Prague.

I also thank you for the leadership on sustainable urban development in the UNECE region and your continued support to the work carried out by UNECE. The Czech Government organized the European Habitat meeting in March 2016 in the run up to the Habitat III conference. Today's European Urban Forum is an equally important international gathering, as it will allow us to reflect on the outcomes of Habitat III.

We are extremely grateful to the speakers and participants who will share their valuable experiences at this event.

When it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, there are multiple challenges in the UNECE region. Last year, UNECE and UN-Habitat prepared the Habitat III Regional Report on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development, as a contribution to the Habitat III Conference in Quito. According to this report, by 2050, almost three quarters (66%) of the world's population will live in urban areas. This will be the Century of the City. Up to 80% of the population in North America and Western Europe already lives in cities. The region's urban population is growing. High levels of urbanization present serious challenges for sustainable development and reduction of carbon emissions. All of these factors can erode quality of life if not addressed.

The 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, and the adoption of the Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets by ECOSOC in July 2017 create an important global framework for addressing urban and housing challenges.

We also have regional agreements, such as the Urban Agenda for the EU ('Pact of Amsterdam') adopted by EU member States in 2016, and the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing. These are important tools to translate the global agreements to the regional level.

The Geneva UN Charter demonstrates the commitment of UNECE member States to improve access to adequate, affordable and healthy housing, with particular attention to young people and vulnerable groups.

The Charter also provides a framework for building smarter and more sustainable cities. It is an innovative instrument as it promotes integrated sustainable urban development, based on the principles of environmental protection, economic effectiveness, social inclusion, participation, and cultural adequacy.

I am very much looking forward to discussing potential synergies and complementarities for the effective implementation of all these international instruments and agreements.

UNECE stands ready to collaborate on this topic. We have a long history of successful cooperation with UN partners on strengthening national capacities for sustainable housing and urban development.

UNECE is also working very closely with the European Union on environmental issues, especially on water. UNECE support the EU's efforts to promote good practices for the implementation of key EU water management policy, such as the EU Framework Water Directive. It might be interesting to discuss similar cooperation for promoting best practices of the Urban Agenda for countries neighboring the EU. This is an area of core expertise at UNECE.

We warmly invite you to visit us in Geneva and discuss further cooperation.

This year, the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management will celebrate its 70th anniversary. We cordially invite you to attend the Committee session and its Ministerial Meeting on Housing and Land Management, which will take place on 8 and 9 November in Geneva. From 8-10 November, various events will address housing policies in the EU, building national capacities for housing and urban development in countries with transition economies, and sustainable real estate markets. Again, we warmly invite you to participate in all of these events.

I wish all of us a dynamic and fruitful dialogue. I hope that this European Urban Forum will help us build upon our existing partnerships with the European Union, the UN system organizations, the private sector, academia and local authorities, to continue working towards our common aim.

Let us work together to make cities smarter, more sustainable, and more livable, with the highest quality of life possible.

Thank you.