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Statement

by

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at the

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Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,
Representatives of United Nations Agencies, other international organizations
and the civil society,
Dear colleagues and Friends,

I am very happy to welcome all of you to the UNECE Regional Review meeting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the most visionary agenda for gender equality – the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Your presence today – from young gender advocates to high-ranking government officials from 51 UNECE member States– testifies to the importance of this review; it manifests your strong will and readiness to jointly accelerate efforts to make gender equality a reality in our region.

It is my pleasure to welcome Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva who recently became the first woman to hold this position.

I am also delighted to welcome the distinguished co-host of our meeting, Ms. Åsa Regnér, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women.

I would like to thank our co-host UN Women and their regional office for Europe and Central Asia, as well as the regional offices of UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and FAO for their excellent cooperation and support in the preparations for this meeting.

I would like to also congratulate the organizers of the Civil Society Forum that took place yesterday, as well as all participants from women's groups, NGOs and other associations. We look forward to hearing the messages that you will bring to us from your discussions.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Gender equality needs to be realized at the national and local levels. In preparation for this meeting, 51 member States sent us their national report with their assessment of success and failures in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. This outstanding response is evidence of the importance member States attach to the review process and its objectives.

While the key trends in implementation will be reviewed at the next session, I would like to take up some of the major findings of the synthesis report, which was prepared based on your national reviews.

UNECE member States have prioritized three main areas: combating violence against women, women's economic empowerment and political participation. The synthesis report finds that over the last five years progress was registered in all these areas.

However, this progress remains insufficient to end gender inequalities, and its pace is slow, with significant variations across the UNECE region. Structural barriers to gender equality and direct and indirect forms of discrimination persist.

The UNECE region is diverse, and so is the progress towards gender equality in countries and sub-regions. Let me give you a few examples:

The gender gap in labour force participation in the UNECE region continues to be persistently high with a wide range across the countries - between 6 per cent to almost 40 per cent.

The average gender pay gap for the region is on a decline, but it varies from 6 per cent to 49 per cent.

About one-third of managerial positions are held by women, with the proportion ranging from 15 per cent to 48 per cent across the region.

These numbers are not encouraging. But they indicate how far we are from the finish line: they can be thus instrumental in selecting effective policies. They provide us with a base to compare and select good practices.

The most glaring gap in the region that the synthesis report identifies is the absence of a gender perspective in environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management. The fast spread of online forms of violence against women and girls is another emerging challenge. It requires a comprehensive response across educational, justice and ICT sectors.

We need to strengthen our efforts to address the old challenges and find solutions to the new ones. We cannot wait another five years, or a quarter of a century, or even longer.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Over the next two days, interactive panel discussions will allow for a fruitful exchange on the key areas that member States have told us you would like to discuss:

After presenting key trends from the above-mentioned synthesis report in a few moments, we will turn our attention to structural barriers that prevent the economic empowerment of women in the region. The discussion will focus on gender gaps in labour markets, entrepreneurship, access to capital, equal payment, social protection and services.

In parallel to this session, we will focus our attention on one of the worst abuses of human rights - violence against women and girls. The background document for this panel, prepared by UN Women, details the staggering extent of this problem: cyberstalking, trafficking, physical abuse and rape, and early child and forced marriage are but some of the forms of violence faced by women and girls.

Gender equality is matter for women and men, boys and girls. It needs to be embedded in the education system in order to turn into a powerful tool for the transformation of society. The links between gender equality and education, effective legal, policy and planning frameworks, better teaching and learning approaches to raising awareness will be discussed by another panel.

Our session on smart investments will debate how to re-think the fiscal space to ensure financing for gender equality. This interactive discussion will be an

opportunity for dialogue with a variety of actors, including the public and private sectors, civil society and international institutions.

Women's participation in policy and decision-making is vital to accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs. While there are some promising developments, there is a need for greater political and civic engagement to advance women in decision-making positions. The dialogue on women's leadership will bring together leaders and decision-makers from different public spheres to discuss obstacles to women's advancement and address policies to boost women's full and equal representation and participation in decision-making.

We will have a debate on key approaches and measures to make national climate change plans and strategies more gender responsive and inclusive. This is necessary to empower women to build climate resilience

For the first time, the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Platform for Action can be linked to a time-bound framework – that of the 2030 Agenda.

The final thematic interactive panel will highlight key linkages between the two frameworks in six areas:

- i. inclusive development, prosperity and decent work;
 - ii. tackling poverty and social protection;
 - iii. freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes;
 - iv. participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions;
 - v. peaceful and inclusive societies, and
 - vi. environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation.
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The thematic areas will be addressed by different stakeholders in order to highlight diverse perspectives.

In addition to the formal programme, there are ten side events organised by our member States and partners. The themes cover broad issues from gender mainstreaming methods and tools, aging and gender to rural women and gender-based violence, and they all promise to be informative and very interesting. I strongly encourage you to attend.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNECE is committed to helping its member States achieve the SDGs, including of course SDG 5.

We aim to address gender issues in all areas of our mandate. This can take many different forms, for example: collection of gender-disaggregated empirical evidence and statistical data. It can reflect gender aspects in legal and business environments, or it can debate how to involve women entrepreneurs in public private partnerships. This year, we launched a Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development. It calls on all standards bodies, whatever their business model and operations modality, to mainstream gender in the standards they develop and the development process itself.

At UNECE we consider it vital to train women in entrepreneurial skills, and provide knowledge on how to successfully set up, manage and grow their own businesses, network, use new information and communication technologies, etc.

UNECE has collaborated with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center and Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation since 2006, providing biannual training workshops for professional women from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. These workshops cover support systems for women entrepreneurs and information and communication technologies.

We support the gender mainstreaming of economic policies in particular in the countries of the Special Programme for the Economies in Central Asia (SPECA for short). The SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs, which met yesterday, provides a forum for the exchange of good practices, data and expertise in achieving the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women in our Central Asian member States.

I would like to assure you that UNECE will continue to implement the strong mandate of the international community to promote equal opportunities for women in all areas of our work. And we look forward to expanding our partnership with many of you.

Let's work together to turn the goal of gender equality into a reality by 2030.

Let's work together so that every girl and every woman can live in safety and with dignity.

I wish you fruitful discussions over the next two days and look forward to the outcomes of the meeting. Thank you.
