



Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Geneva, Switzerland | 1-2 March 2018

Opening Remarks by the Chair

Ambassador Michael Gerber, Swiss Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development

Ms President of the ECOSOC, Ambassador Marie Chatardová

Ms Executive Secretary of the UNECE, Olga Algayerova

Ms Chair of the Regional UNDG Team for Europe and Central Asia, Cihan Sultanoğlu

Distinguished Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues

Good Morning and welcome to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region!

I cordially welcome you to this Forum – and to Geneva, which is situated (at least partly) in Switzerland. And this is where I am from. I am Switzerland's Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development and for the last five years I had the privilege to represent my country in the international discussions, processes and negotiations on the establishment of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. And it gives me great pleasure to see where all this work has brought us until today. Work that was actually not only conducted in New York but all around the world – in fact, a lot has been done right here in Geneva, and, of course, in the UNECE region.

I am delighted and honored to act as Chair of this important Forum, with so many distinguished delegates from Member States, experts and such a great number of representatives from civil society, academia and the private sector. Thank you all for being with us and for interacting!

Let us start with the formalities: I have the honor to formally open this meeting. I would like to ask all participants to adopt the annotated provisional agenda (ECE/RFSD/2018/1), which has been issued in three languages. The agenda is further detailed in the programme of the Regional Forum. If there is no objection, the agenda is adopted.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen

To start with, please allow me to remind us all, why we are here today and what purpose this Forum serves. Well, the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) follows up on and reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) in the UNECE region. It shall create a regional space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. By focusing on practical value-added and peer learning, it shall help us identify major regional and sub-regional trends

To achieve these objectives, interaction is essential. We all know that the universal, integrated and transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda can only be realized through joint effort. We all want to achieve the SDGs. This is certainly a great challenge for our countries, but also a challenge for us as individuals, and communities of any kind.

Some of the challenges we face in the countries of the UNECE region are different, but many are similar. Today and tomorrow, here in Geneva, we have an opportunity to deliberate *on* and hopefully find common ground *for* ways forward. Thus, the idea is to learn from each other and to mutually benefit.

Yesterday, countries of the region which conduct Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) this year came together for a fruitful exchange, to share their experience, challenges as well as good practices. At the same time, a Civil Society Pre-Meeting took place in order to prepare inputs into this Regional Forum as well as recommendations on the SDGs under review, and on civil society involvement in implementation processes.

I sincerely hope that these exchanges and this spirit of interaction will continue today and tomorrow. All of you will be able to contribute *to* and get valuable insight *from* the roundtable sessions on the SDGs, which are being reviewed and discussed at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) this year.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Speaking about the HLPF: We will of course bring the findings and conclusions of this Regional Forum to the attention of the HLPF in July, as the other Regional Commissions of the UN will also report back from their regional fora. On this occasion, we will have the opportunity to hear and learn from the other Commissions and regions about their challenges as well as ways to address them.

The establishment of this review mechanism has actually been a high priority concern for Switzerland from the very beginning of the international deliberations and processes on the 2030 Agenda. And today it works, ladies and gentlemen! From the national to the regional and to the global level, including the thematic reviews. In my personal view, we can be proud of this achievement, as it strengthens accountability all over the world.

The HLPF has become a real global multi-stakeholder review platform. One indicator of success is the number of countries that have presented a VNR: 22 in 2016, 43 in 2017, and a planned 48 in 2018. The inputs by the UN Regional Commissions have also been well received. And

with the optimization and increasing institutionalisation of platforms, processes and concrete co-operation at the regional level they are becoming even more important in the future.

This shows that the momentum is still there. It is actually here and now! But, as you all know, the 2030 Agenda is a 15-year endeavour, of which less than 13 years are left. So more dedicated action is certainly needed.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let us keep and seize the momentum. I would therefore like to invite and encourage you to actively engage in this Forum in order to make it a meaningful platform we all benefit from. Exchange with as many participants as possible and provide your questions and ideas in as many discussion segments as possible.

I thank you very much in advance for your active and inspiring contributions!

With this, I would like to declare the Forum open again and hand over to the distinguished high-level speakers in this Opening Segment.