

REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN UNECE REGION GENEVA, 1 MARCH 2018

OPENING STATEMENT

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On behalf of the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia, welcome to the second Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. These meetings are a valuable opportunity for learning and the exchange of experiences.

In the three years since the SDGs were launched, all governments in this region have lead important strategic dialogues and planning processes on sustainable development, which have accelerated progress in many ways.

- Citizens have been engaged in shaping discussions about longer-term policies and programmes;
- Policy planning frameworks are being streamlined;
- The ground is being laid in many countries for advancing sustainable development through innovation;
- Young people are expressing their views about sustainable development in their country and beyond;
- Alternative forms of financing the SDGs are being tested;
- The role of the private sector in sustainable development is becoming more defined;
- Dialogues over SDG indicators have triggered much-needed reviews of statistical capacities and systems.

Despite these positive shifts many countries are implementing national plans while facing complex systemic challenges, bottlenecks, and the growing impact of global megatrends, which all stand in the way of progress on the path towards 2030.

Let me highlight just a few particularly complex challenges, as they relate to this region.

- Access to safe and sustainable sanitation and drinking water is fundamental in promoting health, well-being, dignity and development. Still, more than 100 million people in the region do not have access to safe drinking water or adequate sanitation.
- Investments in affordable and clean energy for all will boost our efforts to eradicate poverty. All countries of the eastern part of the region have at least part of their household population in so-called energy poverty, which severely impacts the potential

for economic growth, negatively affecting people's livelihoods and the quality of social services.

- In many countries inequalities in income, wealth, and access to justice are seen as large and growing. The largest proportion of the 650 million people living in extreme poverty around the world are increasingly to be found in Middle Income Countries. This underscores the importance of the leave no-one behind dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, which is about integrating the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
- There is exponential growth of some cities in the region while others are declining rapidly. Urgent changes are needed for cities to adapt their local infrastructures to absorb growing populations and other social, economic, and technological changes.
- Migration, climate change, food insecurity, violent extremism and conflict, all have an impact on SDG achievement.

In the face of these major opportunities - and challenges - the United Nations must deliver. Spearheading a global transformational agenda needs leadership. Promoting sustainable, inclusive development is the best way to counter any negative impacts of global threats.

As the Deputy Secretary-General has already highlighted, under the leadership of the Secretary General, the UN system is currently setting out a new strategic direction for the future.

UN agencies, funds, and programmes have already committed to working better together, with stronger coherence and collaboration, and with a sense of urgency to better support countries to achieve sustainable development.

At the regional level, our goal must be to support country-led efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and foster partnership-based approaches to integrate these three strands, so that:

- policies and programmes are risk informed and resilient;
- development accomplishments can survive crises and disasters;
- development finance gets to where it is most needed;
- the widest range of skills and resources are available for effective solutions, both from within the UN system as well as from other partners.

In our region, such approaches are already being tested through MAPS missions, the inter-agency composition of which directly addresses the needs of the host country. Such missions already took place in seven countries, with the others being prepared. We have involved the World Bank in these missions, and are working with other International Financial Institutions, including European Investment Bank and EBRD, to ensure new financial instruments and partnerships are brought to bear.

Effective cooperation at the regional level is another big aspect of transformational leadership. We can be proud that in this region such a “new generation” model was defined and successfully implemented for the last several years. In fact, the Regional UN System in Europe and Central Asia was recognized by the UN Secretary-General as a model of cooperation to be adopted in all regional settings.

Realization of a transformative agenda like the SDGs requires highest levels of expertise and policy proficiency. This is available in the UN agencies. To make it easily accessible to all countries, we established Issue-Based Coalitions. These are platforms, where agencies’ expertise in health, gender, youth, SDG data, social protection, and migration and resilience, is brought together to serve country needs.

The world has less than 5,000 days until 2030. It is not much if we consider the breadth and reach of the 2030 Agenda. Unless we promote and accomplish transformational changes in our mindsets, in the way we do business, in our lives, it will be difficult to achieve the ambition of this sustainable development agenda.

Changes are taking place, but there is a need for acceleration. That is what this meeting is about.

Thank you.