

Opening Session, 1 March 2018, 10:00-11:00 (CICG, Room 2)

**Opening remarks by H.E. Marie Chatardová
President of the Economic and Social Council**

Ambassador Gerber, Chair of the Forum
Madam Deputy-Secretary General Mohammed
Madam Executive Secretary Algayerova
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

Let me first thank the UN Economic Commission for Europe for inviting me to their regional forum on sustainable development. It is my honor and pleasure to be sharing the floor with this distinguished group of people which shows our dedication to linking the regional aspects to global ones.

We live in a time of profound change. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty over the last decades. Economies are growing in many countries and are changing the face of the global economy. New technology and innovation is impacting all aspects of our lives and giving us new opportunities to make our economies and our societies more sustainable.

At the same time, we are also experiencing rising inequalities in many countries, undermining social cohesion and participation in economic, social and political life. There is no doubt that we live in challenging times.

Crucial international frameworks, notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the New Urban Agenda, directly address these pressing global challenges. We need to strengthen our multilateral system and work together to achieve goals set in these frameworks and devise effective solutions by aligning them for effective implementation towards prosperous societies.

In this regard, upholding the underpinning principle of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind is of the utmost importance. Reaching the farthest behind first and satisfying the needs of the most vulnerable should be our priority. But in order to be able to do that we need to update how we collect and utilize data. If this portion of the population is not visible, we won't be able to reach them. Disaggregating data is therefore a must. We will work from our side at the global level, but we also encourage you to work at the regional level to help countries in this regard. We also need responsive and adaptable institutions to undertake these challenges and to take on new tasks and change the mindset how we implement policies and strategies.

I believe that the ECOSOC and its system has a key role to play in this regard. Member States have high expectations towards ECOSOC system to contribute to the High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) as the central platform for the follow-up and review of the SDGs at the global level.

In this cycle, the Economic and Social Council will be focusing on the theme “From global to local: supporting sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities”. This is aligned with the 2018 HLPF theme, “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”. It is also the key priority of my Presidency: fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all.

The whole-of-society approach is very important not only because everyone needs to be included, but also engaged. It is essential that as part of good governance and just and inclusive societies, everyone gets access to equal opportunities thus creating sustainable and resilient societies that can overcome global challenges facing us all.

This is why I am pleased to see that this Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is closely aligned with the HLPF theme and the SDGs under in-depth review, and is providing valuable regional inputs and perspectives to the global discussion. As in previous years, and despite time constraints, there will be space to present and discuss the outcomes of the Regional Forums at the HLPF. We will only be successful if SDG implementation, follow-up and review is well connected from local, national, subregional, and regional levels up to the global level.

The rising number of Member States presenting Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in New York shows that the HLPF has become a success story. Countries from the UNECE region, representing almost one third VNR countries, have made an important contribution to this achievement. Seeing how countries have mobilized their forces around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is indeed encouraging, because by mapping to see where they are, countries are identifying their priorities and are aligning them with their national and regional plans and their national budgets. Czech Republic presented its VNR last year and I can tell you that it was a revealing experience where we had not only identified what we need to do internally, but also what actions we needed to undertake to be a better global partner.

I would also like to express my satisfaction with a participation of civil society and a range of other partners that are involved in the Forum as we as Governments cannot do it by ourselves. We need engagement and involvement from all.

Let me finally say that participation is also at the center of today’s lunch time event organized by my country, which I have the pleasure to open. The event is entitled “Achieving SDGs by participation of all in the light of strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures”. The event will touch upon the experiences of the Czech Republic and Georgia, and you are cordially invited to participate in this one as well as in many other interesting side events.

I would like to conclude to thank the ECE once again for the invitation and I wish you interesting and fruitful discussions.