

Item 2

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, I am pleased to greet all participants of today's meeting and express our gratitude to UNECE Secretariat and you, Madame Executive Secretary for attracting attention of the Member States to such an important matter during this session. The topic of Smart and Sustainable Cities is indeed a challenging one and it encompasses a number of issues currently covered under Agenda 2030.

For recent decades high urbanization has become a serious challenge for many countries. Cities are key living areas enabling people to develop humanitarily, socially and economically.

Meantime, from our point of view smart sustainable cities are an important base for realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It covers not only traditional aspects such as urban planning but also issues related to transport, energy, environment, education, health and green economy among others.

In this regard addressing the issue of affordable, decent and healthy housing and provision of basic services for different groups and vulnerable populations is one of the top priorities for the development agenda of our country, which is also in line with Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing unanimously adopted by UNECE Member States in 2015.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

Taking this opportunity, I would like to share with you some information on and experience we learned in building smart sustainable cities on the example of capital Baku.

According to the World Economic Forum's "The Global Competitiveness Report" 2017-2018, Azerbaijan holds 36<sup>th</sup> position out of 140 countries in terms of internet users. For your information, around 80% of the population in Azerbaijan is internet users. "Public Internet" project being realized in the capital, ensure that local population and tourists have a direct access to the "Free Wifi" public spots.

The intellectual transport management system has been used in Baku since 2011, which plays crucial role in increasing road traffic safety, efficient management of city passenger transport reducing transport flow's harmful effect to the environment and improving the traffic quality for road traffic participants.

Since 2009 "Safe City" automated management system has been operational in Baku. This system is created to increase control for public safety. Thanks to the internal observatory instruments within the system, safety of state buildings, streets and squares, educational, cultural and medical institutions, social and transport related properties are ensured.

Alternative energy is also an important factor in "Smart City" concept. Presently in Baku as well as in several other regions the road signs are lightened by renewable energy sources.

Also, improvement of air quality is one of the main priorities of the state policy in Azerbaijan and significant work has been done in this regard in recent years. Restructuring of enterprises, suspension of imports of vehicles that do not meet environmental standards and accelerating transition to higher standards of fuel and expanding forestland are now the main tasks in this direction.

With all this done the Government contributes to raising the quality of people's life in cities as well as to the global climate change efforts in the framework of the Paris Agreement.

Along with activities performed in the capital, the Government also attaches great importance to sustainable development and application of new technologies throughout all the country. With this in mind, the next "State Programme on socio-economic development of regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for years 2019-2023" was adopted on January 2019 and that strategy document is presently under implementation.

In addition, State Programme “Smart village” projects are planned to be carried out. Also, in the framework of “United for Smart and sustainable cities” global initiative UNECE Secretariat elaborated “Towards a smart sustainable Ganja” project proposal for the second largest city in Azerbaijan. I do hope that we’ll exert our joint efforts to implement that project and this will create a ground for our further cooperation in smart cities context.

**Ladies and gentleman,**

With regard to the mentioned above I should underline that financial resources generated by Azerbaijan from a number of huge regional projects (energy, transport) and implementation of reforms are being used presently to create more favourable economic and social conditions for the people in cities and other settlements.

**Dear Colleagues,**

As for UNECE and its role in all these processes, we believe that the Commission has a good potential to respond to the emerging challenges in the region and to serve as a platform for exchange of best practices as well as generating new ideas. With this in mind, during the visit of the Executive Secretary to Azerbaijan in November 2018 we signed a Joint Declaration with UNECE on cooperation for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals where both sides declared their intention to closely cooperate for encouraging activities aimed to achieve SDGs at the national level. While appreciating UNECE's demand driven approach, we anticipate positive results with regard to the issues outlined in the Joint Declaration and express our readiness to carry out the relevant activities.

In conclusion I would like to underline that the concept of smart and sustainable cities is not just about ensuring proper management and modern infrastructure, but also sustainably promoting other relevant activities at various levels for the benefit of the people and next generations in our urbanized world.

I thank you for your attention.