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High-level Dialogue

**Statement delivered by Amb. Thomas Fitschen,
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**for H.E. Mr. Jochen Flasbarth,
State Secretary, Federal Ministry for the Environment,
Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety**

Geneva, 14 April 2015

Dear Executive Secretary, distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, colleagues and experts,

2015 is a crucial year for the international negotiations on climate change and sustainable development. The Post 2015 shall be adopted in September, and a little later we meet again in Paris to adopt a comprehensive and binding UN agreement on climate protection for the period after 2020.

But the eradication of poverty and the transition to sustainable development remains a crucial task beyond 2015. The shift towards green and sustainable economies goes hand in hand with these overarching objectives and should be regarded as a necessary and complementary measure to reach common goals, especially in OECD countries and emerging economies which contribute the major share of CO₂-emissions.

Here the UNECE region carries a special responsibility with respect to reducing its carbon intensity. Fossil fuels comprise 60% of primary fuel in the UNECE region,

making the UNECE region one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, accounting for about half of global emissions.

The UN has tabled an ambitious proposal for 17 Sustainable Development Goals – the SDGs – in June 2014, which support the transformation towards a more sustainable future. Among these are goals to:

- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- And last but not least: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns – which is of utmost importance regarding lifestyles and economies in industrialized countries.

These goals include ambitious targets to be reached at the latest by 2030 – including through trans-boundary and international cooperation and capacity-building support.

Concerning the role of our UNECE in the implementation of all of this, one might ask the following questions:

- *In which areas can UNECE provide guidance to its member states by developing regional standards and benchmarks on the implementation of the SDGs?*
- *How can capacity-building and exchange of experience between member states be enhanced and targeted at specific regional needs?*
- *How can sustainable investments be triggered?*

At present the development towards sustainable economic growth in the UNECE region is being threatened due to the ongoing discrepancies in and around the UNECE region, leading to many insecurities regards future developments.

But let us not forget that since its foundation in 1947 the UNECE has provided a platform for dialogue based on trust and has served as a neutral meeting point for its member states. In the turbulent period of the 1990s it has provided advice to many of its member states in the transition process to market economies and the alignment of policies with neighboring countries.

Today, as we are facing yet another challenge that confronts the entire region, the role of UNECE could again lie in providing guidance to its member states on another

region-wide transformation process, namely the transformation towards sustainable development. Here, the ECE could provide guidance

- by developing a common understanding on goals among its member states in its respective committees,
- by involving the private sector to trigger sustainable investments and business development,
- and by monitoring and reviewing the implementation of global policies at the regional level and developing according instruments, for example regional standards and best practice examples.
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The capacities of UNECE bodies should be focused on those topics which can strengthen the involvement of experts and representatives from capitals. To be able to do that, they have to reflect genuine political interests. Relevant and urgent questions for the UNECE region which demand answers include:

- *How can economic growth on the one hand and environmental degradation and rising CO₂-emissions on the other hand be decoupled?*
- *How can best use be made of existing potentials, for example in the areas of energy efficiency and renewable energies while contributing to job creation and innovation?*
- *How can sustainable policies in the UNECE region be aligned and benefit from trans-boundary and regional cooperation?*

The UNECE is already well positioned to provide answers in these diverse areas of work, which are directly linking to the implementation of the SDGs: A task force in the Committee of Sustainable Energy is working on the development of UNECE-wide standards for energy efficiency in buildings. Currently, energy intensity in the UNECE region ranks among the highest in the world, for some countries intensity is three times higher than the EU-average. The Water convention has evolved to provide a strong legal framework on the trans-boundary and regional management of water resources, flexibly adapting to contemporary challenges such as climate change. The Espoo and Aarhus Conventions are gaining international interest due to their unique approaches to regional cooperation in the areas of trans-boundary environmental impact assessments and public access to information.

And these are only a few of the areas in which UNECE can support its member states in the transformation towards a more sustainable future. The UNECE – and I say this in the presence of the Executive-Secretary - has a unique pool of knowledge and people which it should use to provide answers to these overarching questions.

In this regard, UNECE could be a platform for policy dialogue on the transition to sustainable development, taking into account aspects such as future competitiveness, resource scarcity, demographic developments, impact on the environment and innovation needs.

Activities of UNECE should also focus on the implementation, ratification and further development of the multilateral environmental agreements. Experiences on regional cooperation should be shared with other UN regional commissions to increase the outreach of UNECEs activities.

The transition to sustainable and modern energy systems could be supported by developing standards and economic incentive schemes for low carbon behavior, for example by developing national systems for emission trading, which could potentially be linked and thereby answer competitiveness concerns. Soft instruments such as labelling of the energy intensity of appliances could also be an option.

The pathways which member states follow can of course be different – as long as they share the goals. To help staying on track the UNECE could provide a review mechanism for determining the coherence of national strategies with these goals.

I hope that the upcoming thematic sessions today and tomorrow will shed more light on the concrete form of UNECE's role in the transformation to sustainable development in the future. I wish you fruitful discussions. Thank you for your attention.