

Opening remarks by
His Excellency Mr. Janis Karklins
Ambassador of Latvia
Chairperson of the Economic Commission for Europe
at the 68th Commission session
Geneva, 9 April 2019

**Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor to address the 68th Commission Session in my role as Chairman. It has been a true privilege for the last two years for Latvia to run the Executive Committee, especially at the time of the active implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Agenda 2030 has opened new horizons for policy actions, regarding key issues such as poverty eradication, inclusive and sustained economic growth, productive employment, energy, environment and climate change, and other very important issues. UNECE, including through its sectorial activities and working bodies, provides an important platform to support its Member states in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

I think you will agree that the scope and diversity of UNECE is evident not only in its geographical coverage, but also in the scope of its work towards global sustainable development. The Commission is responsible for pioneering efforts across a broad portfolio of transnational issues, from air pollution and water cooperation, to road safety, to statistical capacity, to the safe handling of chemicals, to clean energy, to trade, to population management, and beyond. Many countries in a region as well as globally appreciate all the practical and valuable outputs of UNECE. Some of UNECE accomplishments over the past two years have been a testament to this. Here a few examples:

- the Water Convention was opened globally with the accession of Chad and Senegal. Twenty other countries have expressed interest – a significant step in transboundary water management worldwide.
- The Inland Transport Committee adopted its new strategy until 2030 to increase impact and create a worldwide framework for safe, sustainable and accessible inland transport. It also adopted the text

of a new UN Transport Convention on passenger transport by rail, bringing the number of legal instruments under its purview to 59. The number of UN Member States Party to these instruments increased to 147.

- The UN Road Safety Trust Fund was established and received almost USD 20 million in pledges within eight months.
- Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan committed to restore over 2.5 million hectares of forest landscape under the Bonn Challenge by 2030 – a significant step in forest conservation and growth in the subregion.
- UNECE pioneered the „People-first PPP“ approach, adapting the traditional model of public private partnerships for the SDGs.
- UNECE broadened the dissemination of the principles of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing via Centers of Excellence, including one established recently in Vienna.
- In an excellent example of cross-sectoral collaboration, UNECE launched the High Performance Buildings Initiative and established partnerships with cities and universities to train future engineers and architects to improve the energy performance of buildings and air quality.
- With strong support from governments and companies around the world, UNECE is building a full-fledged sustainable resource management tool. Centers of excellence are being established in the Russian Federation and China, soon to be followed by others in the EU, the African Union, and various countries.
- UNECE launched a Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries to support the implementation of UN Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange. The standard has seen wide interest and is used by all EU countries, Thailand, Brazil, Uruguay and others.
- We all recognize the importance of data and statistics to meet the 2030 Agenda. Already, 65 countries in the region and beyond have adopted the ECE Road Map on statistics for SDGs that details how to set up a related data systems and develop national reporting platforms.
- At the ICPD+25 conference, we endorsed the review of population dynamics in the UNECE region, and -a new monitoring framework where over half of the indicators are SDG-related.

It is also opportune to mention the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, convened by UNECE for the second time in March. The Forum provides a region-wide platform for SDG follow up and review, focusing on peer learning and exchange of practical solutions.

The list of UNECE products is long and the impact of its work is significant. I would like to thank and congratulate all member States for their effective collaboration within the framework of UNECE. I would also like to thank the UNECE staff for their commitment and hard work in advancing the mandates of our Commission as well as the Executive Secretary for her leadership.

Today's high level segment will highlight the theme "**Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for Sustainable Development.**" I believe that all of us can agree that yesterday's very successful *Day of Cities*, which brought together 47 city mayors from 30 countries is a great starting point for our discussion today. Questions such as how to create smart sustainable cities, focusing on ways to improve the quality of life of people and on improving efficiency of urban operations, services and competitiveness, are not only key points of interest for these cities but also their respective governments. Today we must evaluate UNECE initiatives aimed at supporting governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, and the impact of relevant UNECE norms, standards and Conventions at the national and regional level. We should explore whether and how to take this work to the next level.

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In concluding, I would like to thank the Bureau of the Commission, Belarus and Switzerland, for their dedication to the task and their unfailing support to the preparations of Executive Committee meetings. Especially, I would like to thank ambassador Ambrazevič of Belarus for stepping in my shoes on two occasions during past period when I was not available to chair the ExCom meetings. I hope those were good training sessions for two upcoming years as a Chair of UNECE.

I wish us a productive discussion and very successful session of the 68th Commission.