

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Opening statement by

by

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

Good morning. I am very pleased to mark my first Commission session at UNECE with you here today. Those who are working closer with us, you know very well how unique UNECE is. Over the last two years, we have thought a lot about what we deliver for citizens in our region, and what difference we make in supporting member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our Chairman has given an impressive response already by reminding us of some of UNECE's key achievements since our last session. Tomorrow, you will consider the high-level statement that also speaks to the qualities that you value most about UNECE.

I would like to complement these assessments in my opening remarks. General Assembly Resolution 72/279 reaffirmed the role and functions of the UN development system at the regional level, including the regional commissions, and underlined the need to continue efforts to make this system fit for purpose in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

So, what exactly is the UNECE value proposition?

- **We have strong convening power** that stems from some 200 intergovernmental bodies and our ability to leverage the know-how of close to 18,000 experts with multi-sectoral expertise.
- With our broad normative production, **we are a knowledge hub for the region and beyond with particular transboundary expertise**. Case in point: our 59 Transport Conventions; the 5 Multilateral Environmental Agreements; some 480 standards and recommendations on trade facilitation and e-business; and more than 100 international agricultural quality standards. The list could go on.

- **We engage actively with UN system partners at the regional and country levels.** In fact, we are already delivering on most of the recommendations made for phase 1 of the UNDS reform. UNECE is signatory to all 17 UNDAFs and cooperates with UN country teams to accelerate SDG implementation through technical cooperation and capacity building for our member States. Moreover, we co-chair a strong coordination mechanism of the regional UN system to discuss strategic matters, promote UN system policy coherence and create synergies through work in issue-based coalitions.
- **In the spirit of SDG 17, we collaborate with an excellent network of partners** from the regional and global UN system, academia, civil society and other stakeholders. Just a few weeks ago, this network was on display in our Regional Forum for Sustainable Development that welcomed more than 850 participants, exchanged experiences in SDG implementation in 10 peer learning roundtables and 44 case studies, and brought forward new initiatives in 18 side events. This Forum has become the reference platform for sustainable development in the region. It reflects very well our vocation to be a connector - bringing together governments, other stakeholders and the UN system across sectoral boundaries
- **We work cross-sectorally, in a multidisciplinary way,** to match the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda. The latest expression of this holistic approach is the work under four nexus themes, which we introduced to bring staff and experts from our different sectoral areas together and develop solutions that address several SDGs jointly.

Still, we are ready to do more to be fit-for-purpose, to better address emerging challenges and opportunities, and to deepen the impact of UNECE's normative work.

- We have embarked on a journey to **concentrate our resources on the most relevant, innovative and best value for money activities** in line with the 2030 Agenda. The alignment of our Programme of Work to the 2030 Agenda, and the identification of the 9 + 2 SDGs where UNECE has particularly strong expertise, are part of this process.
- We are **opening many of our instruments to broader audiences**. The Water Convention, now global, is an example, as is the recently adopted strategy for the Inland Transport Committee, which seeks to engage UN member States from outside the UNECE region more systematically.
- We work to **strengthen the impact of our work and demonstrate its results more effectively**. Better communication and new reporting formats, for example in the 2020 budget submission and annual reporting to ECOSOC, will contribute to this effort. An increased focus on strategic partnerships will explore ways to ensure that our normative work is known and used more readily at the country level.
- **Finally, we strive to be more innovative**. We want to focus analytical capacity on scanning the horizon, to identify needs and emerging issues and develop instruments to address them early. And we look to engage with new audiences and deepen strategic partnerships.

All of these tracks to become more fit-for-purpose are visible in our Commission theme “Smart sustainable cities: Drivers for sustainable

development”, and our decision to host, for the first time, a Day of Cities with mayors from the UNECE region. Having witnessed much of the discussions yesterday and looking at the programme for the next two days, I am convinced that we are moving in the right direction. I believe that innovative formats and the engagement of new audiences will open additional opportunities to leverage UNECE’s expertise, in support of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

I wish us all inspiring discussions to build an even stronger UNECE.

Thank you.