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Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development
Geneva, 15 to 16 January 2004

**REPORT OF THE UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Prepared by the secretariat

1. The first Regional Implementation Forum for Sustainable Development within the UNECE region took place in Geneva, on 15-16 January 2004, pursuant to a decision of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at its ad hoc informal meeting on 2 September 2003. The purpose of the Forum was to assess the situation with respect to water, sanitation, human settlements and related cross-sectoral issues in the region and to report thereon to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development at its twelfth session, on 16-30 April 2004, as an integral part of the first, review, year of its two-year implementation cycle. Approximately 300 persons participated, representing governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

2. Representatives from 46 UNECE member States participated: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and Uzbekistan. The Holy See was represented. A representative from the European Commission also participated.

3. The secretariat was provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

4. The following units of the United Nations Secretariat and specialized agencies of the United Nations system participated: United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT, Geneva Office), United Nations Environment Programme, World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank. The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were also represented.

5. The following non-governmental and private sector organizations were represented: Association "For Sustainable Human Development" (Armenia), Eco-Accord Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development, ECORES (Azerbaijan), European ECO-Forum, European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS), Green Don, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA), Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM), Public Services International (PSI), Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), Tor Vergata University (Italy), Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International, Youth Association for Habitat and Agenda 21 (Turkey).

6. The Forum was chaired by Mrs. Margaret Beckett (United Kingdom), Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Three Vice-Chairs were elected: Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), Minister of Environment; Mr. Philippe Roch (Switzerland), State Secretary, Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape; and Ms. Elena Szolgayova (Slovakia), Senior Adviser to the State Secretary, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development.

7. Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová, Executive Secretary of UNECE, delivered the opening speech. Mr. Børge Brende (Norway), Minister of Environment and Chair of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, gave the keynote address.

8. The first three sessions of the Forum focused on the three substantive issues, human settlements, water and sanitation, and included round tables with broad stakeholder participation.

9. The round table on human settlements was chaired by Ms. Elena Szolgayova. The panellists were: Mr. Kamo Khachatryan (Armenia), Ministry of Urban Development; Mr. Wolfgang Forster (Austria), City of Vienna; Mr. Martti Lujanen (Finland), Ministry of the Environment; Mr. Denys Gauer (France), Ambassador for Environment; Ms. Mihaela Al-Bashtawi (Romania), Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism; Mrs. Beate Weber (Germany) Mayor of Heidelberg and ICLEI; and Mr. Stephen Duckworth, CECODHAS.

10. The round table on water was chaired by Mr. Philippe Roch. The panellists were: Mr. Joergen Bjelskou (Denmark), Ministry of the Environment; Mr. Ton Boon von Ochssée (Netherlands), Ambassador for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Czeslaw Wieckowski (Poland), Ministry of Environment; Mr. Vassily Nebenzia (Russian Federation), Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Komil Usmonov (Tajikistan), Ministry for Nature Protection; Mr. Carl Mitchell (United States), United States Agency for International Development; Mr. Claus Sørensen (European Commission), Directorate International Affairs; Ms. Olga Ponizova, European ECO-Forum; and Mr. Jack Moss, WBCSD.
11. The round table on sanitation was chaired by Mr. Zaal Lomtadze. The panellists were: Mrs. Olga Kupkova (Czech Republic), National Institute of Public Health; Ms. Dagmara Berbalk (Germany), Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety; Mr. Tibor Farago (Hungary), Ministry of Environment and Water; Mr. Mihai Vieru (Republic of Moldova), Ministry of Ecology, Construction and Territorial Development; Mr. Oral Ataniyazova, Center PERZENT, Uzbekistan; and Mr. Gourisankar Ghosh, WSSCC.
12. The fourth session, chaired by Mrs. Margaret Beckett, examined the linkages among these issues as well as their linkages with other cross-cutting issues, such as financing, production and consumption patterns, governance, poverty and information for decision-making.
13. During the meeting a number of representatives shared examples of good practices in human settlements, water and sanitation, and sustainable development in their countries.
14. The Meeting agreed that the Chair would provide her summary of the discussion to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Chair's summary is found in document ECE/AC.25/2004/3.

Annex

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, WATER AND SANITATION

1. At the UNECE Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development (15-16 January 2004), a number of participants shared some of their good practices in managing human settlements, water and sanitation. The examples given below are derived directly from participants' statements. No priority is implied by their inclusion, nor were they discussed or adopted during the meeting.

I. HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

2. At the Forum a number of good practices in the area of human settlements in the UNECE member States were presented. More than 5000 Local Agenda 21 have been set up in Europe. They tend to have a strong emphasis on partnerships with business and civil society.

3. Across the UNECE region, urban regeneration has become much more prominent. Countries have experimented with public-private partnerships in inner-city regeneration, cultural districts, and warehouse and waterfront redevelopment schemes. The search for effective strategies for urban regeneration to create employment opportunities, recycle brownfield sites and facilitate investment and improve existing infrastructure has promoted new planning models.

4. The compact city paradigm has influenced urban and planning policies in the UNECE countries. Many national planning policies aim to increase the mix of land uses, in order to generate a culturally more diverse, economically vibrant and socially equitable urban environment. Six specific examples of good practice of urban regeneration are being examined by CECODHAS. All successful cases have relied on joint planning and pooling of funds through public, private and voluntary sector partnerships, including social landlords, local authorities, housing associations, private developers, local communities, contractors, government, non-governmental organizations, and private sector firms. In Finland, the compact city approach has led to significant savings in energy consumption.

5. Many countries in the region are taking a comprehensive and integrated approach towards human settlements. In Armenia, in the aftermath of the 1988 earthquake, central and local governments in cooperation with donors and NGOs have been working on urban development that includes not only new construction and renovation of buildings and infrastructure, but also greening of the area, institutional development, attention to social issues and new employment. Belgium, among others, puts very strong emphasis on the social aspects of human settlements, including guarantees of a basic right to housing, services and infrastructure and strong attention to revitalizing older neighbourhoods in towns and cities. The European Union is developing a thematic strategy on urban environment to be finalized in 2005.

6. Integration of transport and land-use planning is common practice in most countries. Good examples include the finger plan structure in Copenhagen, the integrated land-use planning in the greater region of Stuttgart (Germany) or the ABC-parking policy in the Netherlands. In the United States the planning approaches of Portland and Seattle are frequently cited examples.

7. Many countries are exploring the use of multi-stakeholder groups for decision-making on human settlements. Sweden has set up a Government Environmental Advisory Council on Building and Living to bring together real estate management companies, developers, contractors, architects and consultants, suppliers, banks and insurance companies, telecommunications companies, and three municipalities. The participants have agreed on a vision for sustainable development up to 2025 with long-term and medium-term objectives and strategies. In 2003, an agreement on measures to create a sustainable building sector was signed between the Government, 32 companies, 4 municipalities and 1 government agency.

8. The United Kingdom has set up a high-level task group of builders, developers and environmental advisers to explore ways in which industry and government can work together to promote sustainable development through better environmental performance in new and existing buildings and improve performance on water, energy, waste and building materials such as timber. Belgium is using municipal environmental covenants to work with towns, municipalities and regions to implement sustainable policies.

9. In Vienna new subsidized housing is now subject to “developers’ competitions” that require them to offer a complete product, consisting of planning, ecological measures and exact financial calculations, and they are judged by an interdisciplinary jury along a complex scoring system. The experience has resulted in better planning, reduced energy consumption and lower construction prices. The city has also introduced an experimental housing programme of theme-oriented housing estates, including, for instance, car-free housing estates, solar heating estates, and the use of hot thermal water for heating.

10. Romania takes a comprehensive approach, with several programmes that address housing needs, including a programme for rental housing for young people that is reviewed annually by social committees and submitted to local councils. Albania began a reform of the housing sector in 2001, including establishing a legal framework for assisting the poor and vulnerable groups in gaining access to social housing; establishing partnerships with the private sector for stimulating the provision of affordable housing and loans; and developing the appropriate legal framework for stimulating programmes of urban regeneration and condominium management and maintenance. Poland has recently approved a plan of action for the construction of temporary shelter for households affected or endangered by homelessness.

11. Financing for human settlements is a critical aspect of their success. One source of funding is economic instruments, including pricing policies. Finland, for example, uses road tolls, fixed charges for car ownership, fuel charges and parking charges to encourage sustainable urban transport systems. Most subsidized housing in the United States operates

through creative partnerships with the private sector, with the federal government providing mortgage insurance, rental assistance vouchers, tax credits, gap financing or other financial incentives.

12. Another source of funds is through innovative financial initiatives. For example, through greater public-private partnerships as illustrated by the UNDP-managed Public Private Partnerships for the Urban Environment project funded by the United Kingdom. Another is the United Kingdom Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility, a subprogramme of the Cities Alliance, which is a global alliance of cities working on slum upgrading with funding from ten UNECE member States. The United Kingdom, in order to facilitate capital mobilization from domestic resources, has also recently launched a local currency guaranteed facility, GuarantCo, which is funded by a consortium of donors in the Private Infrastructure Development Group.

13. In the United States, the new USAID Development Credit Authority is working to partially underwrite development financing risks through loan guarantees, bond guarantees and the like, thereby enabling overseas lenders to take on projects that would otherwise not be funded, for instance, for water, waste water, solid waste and transport.

14. During the 1990s, Sweden introduced a Local Investment Programme, with money directed towards municipalities for special investments to improve ecological sustainability.

15. Partnerships provide another means not only of possible financing but also of exchange of good practices, knowledge and training. The Czech Republic established an association called "Healthy Cities" in 1994, with 11 cities, which has now grown to 30 municipalities with a total of over 1 million inhabitants. ANPED undertakes a number of activities to support public participation, share experience, skills and knowledge on how to excel in local action for sustainable development, public participation and community involvement. Through Canada's Sustainable Cities Initiative, Canadian local governments and private sector firms are partnered with local governments in cities in the developing world and countries in transition.

16. The European Sustainable Cities Programme and the Interreg II and III programmes have shown that networking and knowledge sharing between local authorities can help in achieving sustainable development. Belgium puts strong emphasis on cross-border cooperation between local authorities. Its "City to City" cooperation stimulates the development of Local Agenda 21 and a mutual learning process between municipalities in the North and the South.

II. WATER

17. The millennium development goals for water can be achieved only through an integrated approach to the management of water resources on the basis of the river basin. An important breakthrough in this direction is the EU Water Framework Directive, which embodies the principles of integrated water resources management, including a holistic

approach to water protection on the basis of the river basin, the involvement of all stakeholders, and the use of economic instruments.

18. Many laws recently adopted in non-EU countries take a similar approach. For instance, the revision of the Russian Federation's Water Law will have a strong focus on decentralized management on the river basin scale, and on the interaction between decision-makers, water users and the general public. Laws in the United States and Canada have placed emphasis on water conservation and have developed guidelines on water efficiency and water savings for municipalities, households and industries. There has also been a shift from a programme-by-programme, source-by-source, pollutant-by-pollutant approach to more holistic watershed-based strategies, which have given equal emphasis to protecting healthy waters and restoring impaired ones.

19. Increasing attention is being given to the need for management to conserve water in agriculture and to maximize the "crop per drop". Western countries and Central Asian countries are working together to develop appropriate water and soil management strategies for this purpose. Experiments with the involvement of end-users through water users' associations have shown promising results, for example in Turkey and Central Asia. Amended legislation in some East European, Caucasian and Central Asian (EECCA) countries introduces programmes to encourage the setting-up and capacity-building of irrigation user groups, acknowledging the pivotal role of water management at the lowest appropriate level in order to maximize water efficiency.

20. River basin management requires coordinated efforts in the case of transboundary water bodies. The UNECE region has developed considerable experience on transboundary water cooperation, also thanks to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The recent decision of the Meeting of the Parties to open the Convention for accession to non-UNECE countries will allow the sharing of this positive experience with other regions and promote river basin cooperation throughout the world, in particular with countries bordering the UNECE region. Many projects aiming at spreading the lessons of European water cooperation have been developed, such as the twinning arrangement between the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine and the river commission for the Rio de la Plata.

21. Several processes for subregional cooperation have been developed to find common approaches and solutions to common problems. One example is the project on transboundary water cooperation in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, carried out by UNECE, UNEP/Regional Office for Europe, the Ministry for Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Environmental Assessment "Ecoterra". Another example is the agreement among Governments of Central Asia to establish transboundary consortiums to deal with water and energy, agriculture, and transport issues.

22. UNECE countries have taken many measures and initiatives to combat floods. A recent example is the Best Practice Document on Flood Prevention, Protection and

Mitigation, which is an update of the UNECE Guidelines on Sustainable Flood Prevention (MP.WAT/2000/7). The document, developed at the initiative of EU and accession

countries, Norway and Switzerland, aims to describe measures and best practices to prevent, protect and mitigate the adverse impact of flood events on human health and safety, on valuable goods and property, and on the aquatic and terrestrial environment.

23. The development of integrated water management and the achievement of the water supply and sanitation targets require considerable investments and appropriate financing mechanisms to mobilize domestic capital and attract private sector investments. One successful example is the United States State Revolving Fund, dedicated to local governments and the private sector for water, sanitation and other infrastructure, with repayments directed back into the Revolving Fund for re-lending in the future. On the basis of the success obtained domestically with this mechanism, the United States has supported the establishment of or developed revolving funds for environmental projects in other countries. Through its Pooled Community Resources, the United States Environmental Protection Agency is partnering with local community groups to create financially sustainable village-based water programmes with self-imposed tariffs set by local water committees.

24. Domestic financing, through user fees, other economic instruments and national funds, is important. Poland has established both a national fund for environmental protection and water management and provincial environmental funds, and it has introduced more realistic charges for water use and fees for waste-water discharges. Together, these have given the Ministry efficient tools for decoupling industrial growth and municipal water management from the pressure on water resources. The Swiss canton of Berne has set up mechanisms to compensate farmers for the establishment of a buffer zone along the banks of the river Lyssbach aimed at reducing the leaching of nitrates and phosphorus.

25. The private sector plays an important role in water resources management, not only with regard to investment in infrastructures but also for the protection of water resources. An example of how the private sector can help to cut pollution is the voluntary agreements signed in the Czech Republic by the manufacturers of detergents to phase out detergents containing phosphates from the Czech market by 2005.

26. Training and education play a fundamental role in sustainable water management and many European countries have devoted to them important resources in their international cooperation projects. The action of the International Office for Water, a French non-profit association, for instance, provides support to establish training centres in many countries. Awareness-raising is an integral part of education. One good example is the campaign "Water, every drop counts" launched by the Flemish government to inform all water users on how to protect water resources and minimize their use.

27. Common dependency of neighbouring countries on the same water resources can become an engine for cooperation, even in regions where dialogue is otherwise difficult to achieve. Several cooperation projects in the Kura River Basin between Armenia, Azerbaijan

and Georgia, such as the one funded by Germany, are an example of how water management can be a tool towards achieving conflict resolution and political stability.

28. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the EU together with the EECCA countries launched a partnership to implement the water aspects of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, i.e. the 2015 targets on water supply and sanitation and the 2005 target on integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans. This partnership was adopted in Kiev at the fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe."

III. SANITATION

29. Reuse of waste water is receiving considerable attention in the region. For example, in 2003, Italy adopted a decree on waste-water reuse. It stipulates that waste water will be treated to meet specific environmental requirements as well as chemical, physical and microbiological standards and will then be suitable for agriculture, industry and some other purposes (road washing, heating and air-conditioning systems). These measures, while guaranteeing environmental and health safety, could meet more than 29% of the water demand from agriculture.

30. Some countries, including Germany and Sweden, are advocating an ecological approach to sanitation as a possible solution for the problems caused by conventional sanitation systems. Ideally, ecological sanitation systems make it possible to completely recover all nutrients from faeces, urine and grey water, thus benefiting agriculture and minimizing water pollution. They also ensure the economical use of water and its maximal reuse, particularly for irrigation. It is an important means of addressing sustainable consumption and production patterns, and it can contribute to improved health and food security and income-generating activities, especially if combined with rainwater harvesting.

31. Many countries are also introducing innovative methods of waste-water treatment. Germany has built 8,000 biological sewage treatment plants in the municipal sector and its industrial facilities ensure the intensive treatment of waste water and complementary internal measures. Hungary has introduced a complementary programme of individual waste-water treatment networks for certain rural areas where waste-water collection and treatment networks are not environmentally appropriate. Hungary has also recently adopted a national implementation programme for settlement sewerage and waste-water treatment development with a 2008 target for adequate waste-water collection for all areas with a population higher than 10,000.

32. In the framework of a public-private partnership with the global reinsurer SwissRe, Switzerland is facilitating a multi-stakeholder dialogue for the development of a code of conduct for private sector participation in both sanitation and water-supply services. The application of the code should result in a structured dialogue at the policy-making level about the basic values (such as health, environment, human rights, good governance), key principles, and the roles and responsibilities of the various partners in the water sector. To improve hygiene, Switzerland also intends to contribute to a renewed effort to highlight the big potential of the "Hand Washing" initiative launched by WSSCC, the World Bank and

various developing countries with the collaboration of the soap industries. In Sweden, investment in waste-water technology has been made possible by the consistent application of user charges.

33. The United States Safe Water System Partnership works in 19 countries in 5 continents to reduce water-borne diseases in children under five and in other vulnerable populations. The Partnership brings together governments, NGOs and the private sector. It is based on three key elements: water treatment using a locally produced disinfectant solution; safe water storage; and improved sanitation and hygiene practices through social marketing, community mobilization and other approaches.

34. The UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes is the first major international legal tool for the prevention, control and reduction of water-related diseases. Its provisions include the protection of water resources and their related water ecosystems for drinking water supply, adequate safeguards for human health against water-related diseases, and effective systems for monitoring and responding to outbreaks or incidents of water-related diseases. This Protocol could be a source of inspiration for similar legal regimes in other parts of the world.