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**MESSAGE TO SEVENTH “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
Astana, 21 September 2011**

*Delivered by Mr. Jan Kubis, Executive Secretary,
UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)*

I am pleased to send greetings to this important conference, and I thank the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for hosting it.

This conference marks the 20th anniversary of the Environment for Europe process that has provided a vital platform for pan-European cooperation on the environment and sustainable development. By working on an equal footing, the 56 Member States of UNECE, intergovernmental organizations active in the region, NGOs, the private sector and other stakeholders have been able to take many significant decisions. These include environmental assessments, institutional mechanisms for cooperation, multilateral environmental agreements and policy instruments, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Next year, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development offers a major opportunity for progress, both within the pan-European region and globally. I am pleased that the two central themes of your meeting – water and greening the economy – complement the focus of Rio+20.

I know that the sustainable management of water figures prominently among your concerns. I am encouraged to note that the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes will soon be open to countries outside the UNECE region.

I also welcome the efforts of many countries in the ECE region to implement green policies and measures in key sectors. By sharing these examples and agreeing on further steps towards a green economy, the region can provide important impetus for gains at the global level.

As a highly diverse region, encompassing developed and developing countries, you have much experience to offer. Your work here can help foster success in Rio. I encourage you to send a clear message to the global preparatory process that sustainable development must be our top priority and must be achieved. I wish you a productive meeting.