

Reflection from youth on the Biodiversity Stakeholder's Roundtable delivered by Mr. Rustam Murzakhanov, Uzbekistan

We, the young people of the UNECE region, would like to use the opportunity posed by the "Environment for Europe" ministerial conference to give our contribution to the sustainable future of our region. I was listening with great interest to the interventions of the governmental delegates at this roundtable. Some progress has been reported on, however, we feel that there is still a great gap between papers and reality, which concerns young people the most.

At present time, we have the youngest aged population of all times. More than two billion people aged from 5 to 25 years live in the world. We have young, energetic people and an exhausted planet. Today's youth and the coming generations shall be the ones most affected by the dangers posed by environmental degradation and resource depletion. Therefore, we expect the Ministers gathered in Belgrade to take the following points into consideration:

- We need a **new life style paradigm**: the life style adopted by people in so-called developed countries during the 20th century brought them a great degree of welfare and a high quality of life, but it depleted the resources of the whole planet. We have now understood that such a model is unfair and not sustainable: we are already consuming twice the resources that our planet has to offer, and still a great part of the world's population lives in poverty. We have the technology and the ethical duty to change this development model and to promote a more sustainable and prosperous future for the coming generations.
- **Education for sustainable development** is crucial to create this new life style paradigm. We applaud the ministerial statement that resulted from the Kiev "Environment for Europe" conference. We believe that education for sustainable development is a fundamental tool for improving patterns of consumption and production and for conserving biodiversity.
- **Natural ecosystems** underlie the existence and development of our civilization as well as life on the Earth. The main reason for biodiversity loss is that most ecosystem services are not paid for by people. For example, water purification or flood control. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are essential for human wellbeing.
- **Equity** is an important issue, which we would like to see discussed in this conference. The UNECE region encompasses countries whose living standards, development rates and life styles are extremely different. However, it is in the interest of the whole region to preserve biodiversity, therefore it is important that the countries work together in the spirit of joint responsibility to achieve the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss.
- **Intergenerational justice** must be a value to keep in mind. It is important that the current political class make a commitment to preserve the environment for the sake of the coming generations. We need a shift of paradigm, from a merely economy-oriented view of the environment to an ethical view of the planet's resources – these are not "goods" that the current generation can decide to leave their children and grandchildren as an act of generosity, but they are rather a rich patrimony which must be protected and carefully used.
- **Youth is a source of renewable energy**. We do not ask that the Ministers gathered at the Environment for Europe conference solve all our problems, we just ask to be given the tools to work proactively for our own future; we just ask to be heard and to be given the opportunity to show how much we care for our planet and what we are ready to do for it.