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Statement

by

**Ms. Monika Linn
Principal Advisor to the Executive Secretary
On behalf of**

**Ms. Olga Algayerova
Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**the intermediary sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo
Convention and its Protocol on SEA,
(High-level segment, item 6 (b) Introductory remarks)**

Geneva, 7 February 2019

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to address you today on behalf of the Executive Secretary, Ms. Olga Algayerova.

Almost 30 years ago, your countries welcomed the entry into force of the Espoo Convention as a key legal instrument for fostering environmentally sound and sustainable development, in accordance with the 1992 Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. You recognized then that environmental impact assessment, especially in a transboundary context, is essential for ensuring transparency and a systematic analysis of the environmental consequences of economic and sectoral activities.

I am convinced that, today, the Convention and its Protocol have an equally important role to play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They have the potential to translate into action key elements of the 2030 Agenda that include cross-sectoral integration, the precautionary principle and transparent and participatory decision-making.

It would be important that all countries in our region join the Convention and the Protocol and effectively implement them in order to anticipate, prevent and mitigate environmental threats and to promote transboundary cooperation. I am certain that the revised guidelines on the application of the Convention procedures in Central Asia, which are submitted for your endorsement today, will assist the three Central Asian Republics that are not yet Parties to take the necessary steps towards this end.

From our side, the UNECE secretariat continues to do its maximum to assist countries in reforming their legislation and in increasing awareness and capacities for the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol, through technical assistance. Thanks to the funding from the European Union, under the new EU4 Environment project, and from Germany and Switzerland, we are able to support the implementation of many workplan activities in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia also in the coming years. We hope that these efforts will result in extending the membership of the Convention and the Protocol.

I also see great benefits for countries outside the UNECE region to accede to the Convention and the Protocol in the future. Therefore, I once again urge those few remaining Parties that have not ratified the first amendment to the Convention, to do so as soon as possible. Aside from honouring your political commitments, this would constitute an important signal of openness and solidarity.

Increasing the number of Parties is obviously not enough to maximise the benefits of the two treaties within and beyond the UNECE region. It is essential that Parties implement the Treaties consistently and effectively.

This leads me to the work of the Implementation Committee. The review of compliance procedure, which you established in 2001 to assist Parties to comply fully with their obligations, is undoubtedly one of the main merits of the Treaties. The constantly increasing workload of the Committee is an indicator of the importance that Parties and stakeholders place on proper implementation. I trust that you will also confirm this by respecting the outcomes of the compliance procedure and strive for adopting the Committee's recommendations in consensus. I wish to congratulate the Implementation Committee on its hard and professional work in delivering on your requests from your 2017 session in Minsk.

The need to convene this "intermediary" session to finalize your deliberations on compliance issues clearly demonstrates the high complexity and importance of the Espoo matters for the Parties.

I am aware that for some years already, nuclear energy related issues have become particularly topical for you, and that this focus is likely to further increase with the pressing need to clarify the Convention's application to the many lifetime extensions of nuclear powerplants planned in the UNECE region. It is obvious that nuclear energy involves considerable economic and political interests, but it clearly also prompts considerable concern. The Espoo Convention allows countries to act transparently, to inform and possibly reassure the authorities and the public of other countries, and allows them to comment on planned activities that cause them concern.

For the well-functioning of the Convention and its Protocol, it would be important for you, as Parties, to continue your work in a mutually collaborative spirit and to strive for consensus in decision-making.

It may be useful to recall why your Governments negotiated the Espoo Convention and the Protocol many years ago: countries should anticipate, prevent and mitigate environmental damage, including across borders. Early and transparent sharing of information; international cooperation; consultation of the authorities and the public – continue to be essential means for achieving these objectives.

Let me conclude with a few words on the situation of the secretariat: At present, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol receive the lowest amount of voluntary contributions of all the UNECE Environmental Agreements. The “Espoo secretariat” is also the smallest in terms of staffing, which strongly contrasts with its workload. I therefore encourage you to seek to enhance your support to the treaties. That means continuing to expand the number of Parties and other donors that contribute financially, but also increasing the size of the contributions, and actively helping the secretariat in mobilizing resources and in identifying new partnerships. Currently, for its staffing, the secretariat depends mostly on contributions by Norway and then the European Commission. Some years ago, Finland provided a JPO to the secretariat, and I would very much like to encourage Parties to look into this possibility: One more staff in such a small secretariat, even temporarily, would make a huge difference.

I would also like to highlight the value of other in-kind contributions, such as the provision of leadership and expertise for implementation of the workplan activities. The co-chairmanship of Germany and the UK, and the participation of many of you in the development of guidance under the Convention on the life-time extension of nuclear power plants is an excellent illustration of this, and I would like to thank you for your commitment.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will now leave you under the able leadership of your Chair, His Excellency, Ambassador, Mr. Hans Brattskar (*the Permanent representative of Norway to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva*).

I wish you success in your deliberations today.

I am convinced that you will strive for reaching decisions in consensus, even on the most challenging questions, in a spirit of cooperation that characterizes the Espoo Convention and its Protocol.

Thank you for your attention.
