

Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

(8–10 June 2016, Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel)

High-level meeting of Education and Environment Ministries

8 June 2016, Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel

STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

Mr. Chair, Ministers, Excellences, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to open the High-level meeting of Education and Environment Ministries. This event is unique in the way it brings together for the third time representatives of two key sectors that should jointly be driving forces for sustainable development. I would like to say a particularly welcome to UNESCO, who is a key partner and is leading the implementation of education for sustainable development at the global level. I am delighted to see so many non-governmental organizations present. They are proof that civil society is playing an increasing role in contributing to sustainable development agendas in our region.

I would like to highlight the special status of the current third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries which is organized in the framework of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, with a view to assessing progress during the first 10 years of the Strategy and to consider its future implementation. In the coming hour the Ministers of education and environment and other heads of delegation will have to decide on the next steps to be taken to advance Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the region, as a contribution to the Global Action Programme on ESD as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to adopt the Batumi Ministerial Statement on ESD, including the framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

I would like to congratulate the member States and all involved partners with the 10th anniversary of the Strategy which was adopted by the Ministers in Vilnius on 18 March 2005 as a practically applied policy instrument that would facilitate promotion of ESD in the region. They also adopted the Vilnius Framework for Implementation setting up a Steering Committee in order to facilitate coordination and review of Strategy's implementation. Interested donors were invited to support the process.

Since 2005, the UNECE member States are working together on implementation of the Strategy as a regional pillar of implementation the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) under the aegis of UNECE Steering Committee for ESD. The Strategy has furthered the recognition across global education initiatives that education systems must respond to the social, environmental and economic challenges facing the world today. In assessing the Strategy's progress made from 2005 to 2015, the third evaluation report of the Strategy's implementation highlighted that important advancements were made on policy integration, curricula, tools, resources and networking. According the report, hundreds of initiatives have been launched to integrate ESD into the content and process of formal, non-formal and informal education, moving from policy to practice.

However, the challenge of integrating ESD system-wide across all aspects and levels of formal, non-formal and informal learning still remains. For the next phase of work, which is being launched at the present High-level meeting of Environment and Education Ministries, member States should be encouraged to further develop and strengthen strategies, plans and mechanisms for ESD implementation; continue to promote the integration of ESD into education and sustainable development policy; pursue work on school plans, teacher preparation and technical and vocational education and training in support of greening economies; increase the availability of and open access to good quality online ESD resources; and address the need for ongoing ESD research, monitoring and evaluation.

The importance of the process is proved by the fact that ESD is a part of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on education (Goal 4), with Target 4.7 requiring countries to

ensure by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. The implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in the period beyond 2016 will contribute not only to the implementation of SDG 4 and the accomplishment of Target 4.7, but to the implementation of all the SDGs. ESD is a cross-cutting process that will allow for a better understanding and enhanced competences related to all aspects of sustainable development.

I would like to particularly note that, after the renewal of the mandate by the current High-Level Meeting, the UNECE Secretariat will continue providing support to the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in accordance with ECE rules and practices, subject to the availability of resources that is a critical factor.

The discussion on the continuation of the ESD activities after the High Level Meeting was conducted at the last 11th Meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee (February 2016) which has stressed out that it was important to consider a realistic assessment of the situation with regard to financing activities under the Strategy to avoid overambitious expectations. It was agreed that any plans for the future implementation of the Strategy had to be based on such a realistic approach. The Meeting noted that there will be a need for creating a clear link between proposed activities for implementation and available resources, and that availability of financial resources is central to the implementation of the Strategy which relies on voluntary contributions from Member States.

I would like to use this opportunity and express gratitude to those member States that contributed to the trust fund since the last Steering Committee meeting in February 2016 and express hope that the Member States will be able to allocate and mobilize sufficient resources to ensure the continuation, development, consolidation and expansion of ESD, fostering national and local ESD processes for the implementation of the future framework.

I hope that today's High-level Meeting will approve the progress made by the member States in implementing the first ten years of the UNECE Strategy for ESD and reaffirm commitment of the member States for the future implementation of the Strategy that will be

endorsed by the Future implementation framework and the joint Ministerial Statement to be adopted at the end of this Meeting.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Government and the people of Georgia for hosting this Conference, for making it a memorable event, and for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to all of us.

Thank you.