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UNECE'S AIR POLLUTION CONVENTION TO REDUCE BLACK CARBON EMISSIONS

Meeting at the forty-eighth session of the Working Group on Strategies and Review in Geneva last week, countries considered concrete strategies to reduce black carbon emissions, one of the air pollutants identified by scientists as an important link to climate change because of its role in contributing to global warming.

The UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is the first international treaty to take steps to curb such emissions, once again leading the way in addressing emerging pollution issues in an ever more complex and interconnected world.

The reduction of black carbon is being targeted through a revision of the Convention's Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol), which will now include black carbon as a component of fine particulate matter. The detailed dispositions of the Protocol to include black carbon and determine black carbon emission reduction measures are the subject of negotiations by representatives of Parties to the Protocol this week.



The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis estimates current anthropogenic emissions of black carbon from the UNECE area at about 15% of the world's total. Nearly 50% of these emissions originate from the United States and the Russian Federation, while another 25% is produced by the EU-15.

Black carbon, like ozone, is a so-called "short-lived climate forcer" i.e. a warming agent with a relatively short lifetime in the atmosphere ranging between days and weeks. Reducing levels of such agents in the atmosphere is therefore a means to improve air quality, and thus human health, but also to immediately act on slowing down climate change.

According to the findings of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Black Carbon discussed by policymakers this week, black carbon emissions in the UNECE region are expected to decline between 2000 and 2020 by about one third, primarily as a result of ongoing implementation of current emission control legislation in the transport sector. However, additional measures could reduce them by another 40% by 2020.

The current revision of the Gothenburg Protocol with the inclusion of black carbon is scheduled for completion and adoption by December 2011.

In the medium and long term, the UNECE Air Convention will investigate more closely the regional impacts of reducing the levels of tropospheric ozone and its precursors, including methane and carbon monoxide, considering both climate change and air quality/health/agriculture benefits.



Importantly, the solutions implemented by UNECE member States could successfully be replicated in other regions, especially in Asia, where air pollution is a serious and growing concern (emissions of black carbon from China and India alone account for approximately 25%–35% of global emissions, and new estimates indicate that black carbon emissions for China in 2006 have doubled since 2000. □

*For more information, see the report of the expert group, at:
<http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2010/eb/eb/eceebair.2010.7.pdf>.*

MALAYSIA TO INTRODUCE UNECE REGULATION FOR BUSES

The Ministry of Transport of Malaysia has announced its plans to ensure that all public transport buses in the country conform to UNECE Regulations, with the view to reinforce the safety of passengers.

UNECE Regulation No. 66 emphasizes the need to guarantee the state of the bus superstructure in case of rollover. It obliges manufacturers to submit their buses to a resistance test, in order to make sure that the superstructure of the bus does not collapse in case of an accident.

Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Abdul Rahim Bakri said the country wants to reduce its high death rate on roads. Road accidents kill an average of 19 people per day, or 6,800 per year in Malaysia. □



6th STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SETS PRIORITIES FOR ACTION FOR COMING FIVE YEARS

On 7 and 8 April 2011 the sixth meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was held in Geneva, setting the groundwork for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD for the next five years.

The Strategy, which serves as a regional implementation pillar for the United Nations Decade for ESD (2005–2015), aims to raise people's awareness of sustainable development and to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need so that they can confidently and competently apply its principles, thus increasing their opportunities for leading healthy and productive lives with concern for social values, gender equity and cultural diversity.



The findings of the first mandatory national reporting provided evidence that the region has made significant steps forward – the majority of countries have accomplished or are close to achieving policy, regulatory and operational frameworks that support ESD.

In the coming years, the challenge will be to shift the focus from political frameworks to practical implementation and to strengthen the connection between policy frameworks and educational activities. In this regard, it will be important to foster synergies and coordination among processes and stakeholders to solidify efforts in both the formal and informal sectors in support of ESD.

The Committee adopted its workplan for the next implementation phase of the Strategy. It decided to put particular focus on the implementation of coordination and capacity-building activities. Coordination will in particular be supported and strengthened between governmental departments of education and the environment, as well as between non-governmental organizations and departments of education and the environment. In this respect, the Committee asked the UNECE secretariat to organize subregional workshops to promote awareness-raising, information sharing and, ultimately, greater coordination. In order to better connect policy and school activities, the workplan sets the goal that every school should have an ESD plan by 2015.

EECCA COUNTRIES' PRODUCTION GREW IN 2010

After a bleak 2009, gross domestic product (GDP) grew throughout Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) in 2010.

Kyrgyzstan was the only country with shrinking GDP, where coal production (-9 per cent) and agriculture (-3 per cent) led the decrease. GDP still grew in Kyrgyzstan in 2009 like it did in all Central Asia. At the same time, the global economic crisis was more prominent in other EECCA countries.

In 2009, the economic downturn hit hardest in Armenia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Based on 2010 figures, these countries have pulled through the worst for now. Industrial output grew about 10 per cent in both Armenia and Ukraine, while Moldova and Russia reached growth rates of 7 and 8 per cent, respectively. Agricultural output still diminished in Armenia and Russia with a pace of more than 10 per cent compared to 2009. □

Moreover, by adopting the workplan, the Steering Committee members committed to incorporating ESD in teacher educational programmes. To this end, the outcome document of the UNECE Expert Group on Educator Competences, which elaborates a range of ESD educator competences, as well as recommendations for policymakers, was deemed by the Steering Committee to be a vital piece of work.

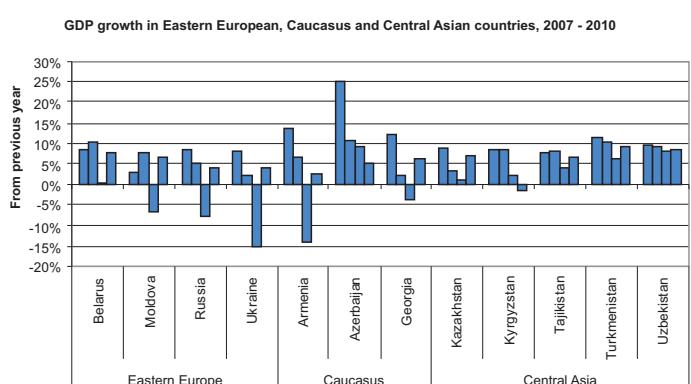
The Committee also highlighted the need to conduct research on how to measure the impact of ESD promotion activities on student learning and attitudes. It therefore decided to support the development of impact-monitoring strategies regarding student learning in the coming years.

In addition, the Committee explored possibilities for creating synergies with other international sustainable development processes. The panel discussion "Taking stock and looking forward – ESD in the context of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)" looked at the role of ESD in greening the economy. The discussion opened by addressing the importance of promoting sustainable thinking, showing that key issues for the transition to a green economy – i.e. raised awareness, public participation and sustainable consumption, as well as reskilling the labour force – are essentially connected to a shift in people's attitudes towards sustainable development. Moreover, the Committee discussed in depth the potential of ESD for promoting green skills and sustainable consumption and production.

Member States decided to further address and promote the role of ESD in transitioning to a green economy by means of a side event at the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Astana, as well as at the Regional Preparatory Meeting of Rio+20 for the UNECE region.

At the stakeholder coordination meeting for ESD, which took place back to back with the sixth Steering Committee meeting, representatives from the United Nations system and other international and non-governmental organizations explored possibilities for jointly organizing these and other such events to promote ESD. It is of vital importance to capitalize on such opportunities, as the implementation of the Strategy's programme and activities rely solely on voluntary contributions from member States. □

*For more information, please visit:
<http://unece.org/env/esd/SC.Meet.htm>*



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (www.unece.org/stats/data), CISSTAT and national statistics.