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**Statement by Mr. Ján Kubiš  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Executive Secretary of the United Nations  
Economic Commission for Europe**

**at Regional Forest Information Week**

**Geneva, 21 March 2011**

Mr Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last two decades, the UNECE region has gone through significant political and economic upheaval, as we experienced events such as: the transition from centrally planned to market driven economies; the steep rise in demand for renewable energy; as well as the recent economic crisis and recession. At the same time, the debate on sustainable development has intensified, in particular on issues related to biodiversity and climate change.

Any response to such complex questions should be based on sound, high quality data and statistical analysis. The Forestry and Timber Section has thus dedicated significant resources to the development of statistics that contribute to the improved quality, availability and exchange of international information on forests and timber. We are fully committed to this effort, and are constantly in touch with other international organisations, research institutions and trade associations to improve and refine our datasets. In addition, through targeted capacity building activities, we are striving to enhance statistical capacity across the region and to improve the international comparability of data.

High quality data represent a fundamental pillar of our work. You are most likely familiar with our data sources, such as the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire, which collects data annually on forest products, and the Joint Wood Energy Enquiry which is now in its third round and is gradually becoming a recognised source of information on wood energy sources and uses. Today, in particular, we shall be focussing on forest resource assessment data, by looking more closely at the State of Europe's Forests process.

So it is clear that data is not in short supply: on the contrary. For example, for the State of Europe's Forest report alone, over 43,000 data elements were compiled. However, data alone is of little use. We need to transform this overwhelming amount of data into messages for policymakers and the public at large. This is no easy task. One way of facilitating this information flow is by developing indicators.

Indicators are important because we can manage only what we can measure. Some may argue that indicators and targets are a far too simplistic response to complex issues, but the reality is that they appear to work! As we face a constant challenge to prevent information overload, indicators are a proven tool for distilling data into a clear and accessible form. Indicators have the beauty of providing data in a clear and concise manner and have the advantage of allowing an analysis of progress made under specific socio-economic and policy contexts.

The primary tools we use for monitoring and assessing the successful implementation of Sustainable Forest Management are a set of Criteria and Indicators. These are a mix of efficiency indicators, which show the relationship to economic variables and policy effectiveness indicators, which show the impact of policy measures. There's no question that the Criteria and Indicator process has been very effective in harmonising national data and drawing together information across Europe, allowing us to obtain a snapshot of the status of and trends in the continent's forests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Notwithstanding these advances in information and data flows, we still encounter gaps. For instance, technical advice provided by the teams of specialists does not always reach the appropriate decision-making levels and policy makers, thereby weakening the role and impact of the teams. During this week, you will have the opportunity to discuss ways and means to link the expert, technical and policy levels by listening to what the representatives of the teams of specialists have to say on the options for improving information exchange.

And, speaking of ideas to improve information flows, we should also listen to what young researchers have to say, promote their innovative spirit and reward their efforts. To support this, I am pleased to announce that the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber section is establishing a PhD Thesis Award. A prize of 10,000 USD dollars will be awarded to the best doctoral thesis providing new data and insights into forest management, and on how to balance forest conservation, forest productivity and social wellbeing. The award is kindly sponsored by Pictet Funds S.A. and submissions are welcome until 15 June 2011. The award ceremony will take place in Antalya, Turkey at the next meeting of the ECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission from 10 to 14 October 2011, where the award winner will be invited to present his or her project.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I draw to a close, I would like to thank all speakers, chairpersons and delegates

who have accepted our invitation to participate in this work. I wish you a successful week of meetings and a pleasant stay in Geneva.

Thank you very much.