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

at

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Rio de Janeiro, 21 June 2012

REGIONAL COMMISSIONS SIDE EVENT

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am honoured and pleased to address you at this side event on green growth and sustainable development.
- Twenty years after the Rio Declaration, I am proud to note that the UNECE region has made good progress in furthering the application of Principle 10, regarding the right to public participation in environmental matters. This has been accomplished through a number of legal and policy instruments, which are unique, even in a global context.
- These are the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, also known as the Espoo Convention; the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development; and, perhaps most directly on point, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, the so-called Aarhus Convention, and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers or PRTRs.
- These instruments offer sound frameworks to help Governments and stakeholders to further sustainable development and good governance and to

choose the most appropriate road maps to sustainability through greening their economies.

- The Espoo Convention increases the transparency of decision-making and promotes resource efficiency in a transboundary context. It does this by obliging parties to notify and consult each other on major projects that are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact on other countries. Its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment provides a unique and important instrument for planning and policymaking related to greening the economy: it integrates environmental and health considerations into economic development while also strengthening public participation in the governmental decision-making process.
- The UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, now entering its third phase of implementation, is focusing on putting the Strategy into action and building on the good progress so far in the region. Education for sustainable development, or ESD, has a bottom-up approach to sustainable development and will have knock-on effects for building green economies. ESD equips people with the values, competences, knowledge and skills necessary for them to put the green economy concept into practice. It also has an important role to play in the successful transition to a green economy by emphasizing the need for technical and vocational education and training that includes a sustainable development component.
- The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs are necessary in building green economies because green policies and a green economy are both impossible without good governance. Wide support from a well-informed public — in their role as voters, consumers, shareholders and otherwise — is therefore essential in legitimizing and ensuring the success of green projects. The Aarhus Convention helps ensure greater public participation in greening the economy, while the PRTR Protocol looks to provide the technical data to be able to measure the progress towards it.
- UNECE legal instruments, such as those I've just described, are central in our efforts to assist countries develop sustainable societies. They are agreements that encapsulate the universal importance of democracy, respect for human rights and respect for the environment, and they have a particular added value in raising awareness and support for a green economy.
- At a time of growing concern over the global financial crisis, and in view of the environmental challenges ahead, such multilateral agreements create opportunities as they support and encourage the development of innovative tools that can generate and sustain economic growth.
- I look forward to further cooperation with the other regional commissions, as well as with other partners and stakeholders, to promote sustainable development through greener economies in the pan-European region and worldwide.
- Thank you for your attention.