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Opening Statement

by

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

“An exhibition of post-disaster housing: Opening ceremony”

**Geneva, Switzerland
10 September 2013 at 15.00**

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honour for me to be here to today to open the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's exhibit of post-disaster housing. This exhibition is meant to draw attention to the importance of reliable, safe and low-cost housing for people who have been forced from their homes by natural or man-made disasters.

At the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, we are committed to addressing these as well as other housing challenges. In particular, our Committee on Housing and Land Management serves as a forum for the exchange of best practices and provides a platform for policy formulation and implementation. The Committee started its work in 1947 to facilitate post-war reconstruction. Since then its tasks have evolved to address the many housing and land management challenges that faced by the countries in our region.

The Committee's principal activities now include assessing countries' housing systems, developing policy guidance and providing advisory and training services.

To support disaster preparedness and recovery, many of our country profiles on housing and land management include research on housing and its disaster preparedness. For example, in Tajikistan, a country where three-fourths of the population lives in 8- to 9-magnitude earthquake zones, we cooperated with the Tajik Government to identify how city planning and building codes can be improved to better prepare for earthquakes. Our upcoming country profile on Moldova also will address the use of both building codes and city planning for earthquake preparedness.

The UNECE coordinates its work with a range of partners, for example, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Development Programme, UN-Habitat and other agencies active in housing issues, including disaster preparedness. We are now partnering with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to improve disaster

prevention and recovery in a variety of fields, including housing.

One of the common problems in post-disaster areas is that temporary homes, installed initially for a short period of time, end up being inhabited for many years and become informal or illegal settlements. Illegal settlements are another important challenge our Committee has to address. In the UNECE region alone it is estimated that more than 50 million people live in informal and illegal homes.¹ A report on the challenges and policy needs created by informal settlements has been published by UNECE, and a second one is now in the making.

Events like the one of today and this exhibit are meant to raise awareness about the millions of people that have no proper home in our region, as well as throughout the world.

It is our responsibility, the UN and member States, to better the living conditions of those displaced during emergencies, while also planning for a better future.

¹ <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/SelfMadeCities.pdf>

The UNECE works hard to make sure our homes will be more secure, safe, energy efficient, resilient and comfortable in the future. If you wish to learn more about our work, I encourage you all to join us at the UNECE Ministerial meeting on Housing and Land Management on 8 October 2013 and the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management session on 7 and 9 October. At the Ministerial Meeting, ministers from throughout the UNECE region will set policy and discuss how they can work together to address housing and land management challenges. This will include a discussion on housing and land management targets to be achieved by 2020 and a strategy for meeting these targets.

These targets include, for instance: reducing the impact of the residential sector on the environment by promoting energy efficient housing; improving access to adequate, affordable, good-quality, healthy and secure housing ; developing sustainable urban and land planning; and establishing accessible, transparent and non-discriminatory land registration systems.

I would like to thank all of you for coming to this event. My special thanks go to Canada and Estonia for contributing their houses to this exhibition. I am confident that we can continue to make strides together towards achieving Millennium Development Goal related to housing.
