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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

the Opening Ceremony of the Astana Economic Forum

Astana, Kazakhstan, 23 May 2013

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure to participate in the traditional Economic Forum in Astana, the breathtaking, modern host city of such important events as the 2010 OSCE summit or the upcoming EXPO-2017. Thanks to the Strategy “Kazakhstan 2030”, the country today ranks amongst the 50 biggest economies of the world, significantly contributing to global energy and food security. The new Strategy “Kazakhstan 50” is leading the country into the next phase of industrialization, characterized among others by knowledge based development and alternative and “green” technologies. I am proud that the UNECE is providing effective assistance to this historic effort. UNECE programmes facilitate the active and successful participation of Kazakhstan in the third industrial revolution and reduction of its dependence on energy and commodities exports through economic diversification and a “green” development model.

The UNECE helps decision makers to understand the impact of adopted policies and instruments not only on the environment but also on economic performance. It promotes the use of energy efficient technologies, market formation, investment in energy efficiency and renewable energies, energy efficient housing, climate neutral cities and innovative public-private partnerships, just to mention a few areas. The UNECE works on generating public support to green development through its Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

Strengthened regional cooperation can greatly contribute to Kazakhstan's successful transition to sustainable economic development. Located strategically between such economic powerhouses as China, the Russian Federation and the European Union, Central Asia has a huge development potential that can be tapped through regional cooperation. UNECE support to the development and operation of Euro-Asian transport corridors or electronic corridors for trade and customs data complements investment in physical transport infrastructure, like roads and railroads. This combination of "hardware and software" is helping Kazakhstan and the whole region become a key east-west and north-south transport hub.

The UNECE is assisting Kazakhstan in addressing global and regional challenges of the 21st century. Achieving environmental sustainability in the Aral Sea Basin, mitigating the effects of climate change, in particular increasing water shortages, are among the most serious long-term problems of the region. UNECE environmental conventions provide a solid legal basis for strengthening cooperation on environmental issues and the management of shared water resources.

UNECE support to the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in the area of the joint management of shared water resource contributed to the highly successful Kazakh Chairmanship of this organization between 2009 and 2012. The Third Aral Sea Basin programme, coordinated by the Kazakh IFAS Chairmanship promises to alleviate the environmental, economic and social consequences of the shrinking of the Aral Sea and to accelerate progress towards environmental sustainability in its Basin.

Regional cooperation in Central Asia can be greatly facilitated by sharing the successful transition of Kazakhstan from the old “brown” to a modern “green” economy. This year, Kazakhstan chairs the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, a time-tested framework for regional cooperation, supported by the UNECE and UNESCAP. I am looking forward to visiting Astana again in November this year to participate in important SPECA meetings focusing on the implementation of the outcomes of the Rio+20 conference in Central Asia. The “Green Bridge” initiative of Kazakhstan is a significant contribution to these efforts through strengthened regional cooperation.

I would like to thank the organizers of this Economic Forum and personally you, Mr. President for offering an annual platform in Astana for the discussion of important global and regional challenges, as well as key issues of economic and social development of Kazakhstan. It provides valuable insights and fresh ideas for the United Nations, to support more effectively the rapid and sustainable economic development of Kazakhstan and the whole region of Central Asia.

Thank you.
