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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

**Side event hosted by the Government of Turkey
“Sustainable Development and the Post-2015 Development Agenda:
Voices from the Region”**

New York, 27 September 2013

1:15 – 2:30 PM

Turkish Cultural Centre

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Government of Turkey for hosting this important event. The region of Europe and Central Asia has a lot to contribute to the debate on what a development framework succeeding the MDGs should look like. As your Excellency, Minister Yilmaz, and the UNDP Administrator and UNDG Chair, Ms. Clark, have pointed out, the region is already playing an important role in the ongoing process of shaping the post-2015 agenda, for instance through numerous national consultations and participation in global discussions. It is important that we continue to make the voice of this region heard in the process and share its experiences and lessons. Europe and Central Asia is prepared to make a distinct and thoughtful contribution to the new development agenda, supported by the UN System in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UNECE region is diverse and unique. It includes high-, middle- and low-income countries in Europe, North America and Central Asia. The eastern part of the region has had a particular history with two decades of socioeconomic and political reforms. At the same time, despite this diversity, there is also a great deal of commonalities between the different countries.

Against this backdrop, we have been working over the past months with the UN System in the region – about a dozen UN entities in the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and together with the UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia – to formulate a common vision for the post-2015 development agenda. We have pooled our expertise across various areas, because we see the development of a new agenda as a valuable opportunity to learn from and go beyond the MDGs. It is clear that the post-2015 agenda, whatever form it will take, will shape development efforts for many years.

Today, I have the honour and pleasure to officially launch the outcome of this exercise. Copies of the publication that was produced are available in this room. We have deliberately created this report as a series of 14 short thematic pieces, accompanied by an advocacy paper that lays out the overall vision. The short issue briefs can be read in their entirety or selectively by area of interest. They provide policy-makers and negotiators of the future development agenda with a concise overview of the key points for each issue.

All countries in this region face similar challenges in building more inclusive, more sustainable and more prosperous societies. These challenges certainly differ in terms of magnitude, sub-regional, national and local circumstances, and the specific policies needed to address them. But they fall in similar categories throughout the region. On this basis, we have derived three key messages, which I would briefly like to highlight.

Firstly, a key challenge is ensuring inclusion and reducing all forms of inequalities. This also applies to the advanced economies, in which most people enjoy decent living standards. But even here, national averages mask serious inequalities. We are experiencing rising gaps between the wealthiest and the poorest in many countries throughout the region. Marginalized groups such as migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities or residents of rural areas are lagging behind. The global financial and economic crisis has adversely affected many key areas, such as employment, health, and education.

In order to address inequalities, it is necessary to create decent jobs, invest in quality health and education services, strengthen social protection, and tackle the structural causes of gender-based discrimination.

Secondly, many countries are also struggling to reconcile economic and social development with environmental sustainability. It is apparent that the conventional development model with growth at its centre is not suited to resolve today's challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize sustainable development and place it at the centre of development efforts. For the high-income countries, the task is to significantly reduce

their ecological footprint and the emission of pollutants and greenhouse gases, and to change production and consumption patterns. Middle-income countries need to improve their resource efficiency. The challenge for low-income countries is to find ways of dynamic economic and social development that respect ecological boundaries.

The transformation to a green economy is a major task in this regard. It requires a country-specific policy mix that may include investments in science, technology, innovation and education. A number of countries in this region are implementing policies to advance this transformation, and I believe that this region could take a leading role in creating green economies.

Last but not least, the challenges we are facing require new approaches in the way we develop and implement policies, work with partners and engage stakeholders. No single institution, government ministry, or sectoral policy can resolve today's increasingly complex issues. Cross-sectoral cooperation is essential, particularly at the national and local levels.

Enhancing the voice and participation of the society as a whole is also crucial in moving towards more inclusive and sustainable societies. This includes forging stronger partnerships with civil society and the private sector.

Moreover, international cooperation at the regional and global level will be vital. UNECE is working to further develop regional cooperation on sustainable development issues, including through the exchange of policy experiences, implementation of legal instruments, and capacity-building.

The UNECE region will also continue to play a vital role within a renewed global partnership for development, including as a major donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are core priorities for a future development agenda for many countries in our region. I firmly believe that they also resonate at the global level. These priorities can be integrated in a truly global framework with responsibilities for all countries, regardless of their development level. I am convinced that such a universal agenda would be to the benefit of all countries.

Much of the debate on the post-2015 framework is focussed on pressing global challenges. However, let us not forget: there are also considerable opportunities. A well-designed development agenda could be a forceful contribution to strengthen inclusion, equality and sustainability on the international agenda and achieve real change in this direction.

In our region, we want to forge discussions with all our partners on the new development framework. To this end, a Regional Consultation entitled “Inclusive and Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Europe and Central Asia on the Post-2015 Development Agenda” will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, on 7 and 8 November 2013. The Regional Consultation is co-organized by UNECE and UNDP. I thank the Government of Turkey and Minister Yilmaz personally for the kind offer to host this meeting.

The Regional Consultation will be a multi-stakeholder event, bringing together representatives from governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and international organizations. The meeting will feature a series of thematic panel discussions and conclude with an open forum that will identify regional priorities for the post-2015 agenda and formulate the regional contributions to the global debate. The meeting will be preceded by a full-day civil society consultation.

Through these and other channels, I am confident that this region will provide important inputs to the ongoing deliberations.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to our discussion today.