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Opening remarks

by

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe**

at

**the seventy-fourth session of the Committee on Housing
and Land Management**

Room XIX, 10:00, 7 October 2013

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with pleasure that I welcome you to the seventy-fourth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Committee on Housing and Land Management.

Today is World Habitat Day. On this occasion we are invited to reflect on the state of our towns and cities and the basic right of all, to adequate housing. World Habitat Day is also intended to remind the world of its collective responsibility to ensure sustainable housing for future generations.

This year, the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management has focused its World Habitat Day celebration on post-disaster housing. This includes a press conference today at 12:45 in the park of the Palais des Nations next to an exhibit of transition housing for post-disaster areas and will be followed by a reception. The transition houses in this exhibit were provided by Canada and Estonia, and I would like to sincerely thank them for their support.

Many people have come together here to discuss our work over the next 3 days. More than 200 people, including representatives of 54 of the 56 UNECE member States and several observer States, have registered to participate in these Committee events. In addition, we have with us representatives from a range of international partners

as well as the private sector, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies in order to discuss how to improve housing and land management in our region and beyond. I am happy that we have delegates from beyond our geographical region here and hope that this will lead to greater and better cooperation on housing and land management issues between countries in the different regions of the world.

In this session we will discuss our latest accomplishments and our goals. The member States of the UNECE, the UNECE secretariat and our partners, have much to be proud of. To name just a few highlights from this session, you will hear about:

- Tools to promote cleaner energy in our *Casebook for Energy Efficiency*;
- Guidelines for green home rating systems;
- A thorough study of national land registration and mapping systems in our region;
- A new study on the challenges and opportunities Ukraine faces in housing and land management;
- Work to promote the sharing of experience and best practices through a series of seminars, training sessions, roundtable discussions and workshops.

Recently, the UNECE member States conducted a thorough review of the work of all UNECE Committees, including the Committee on Housing and Land Management. The Committee was evaluated as producing useful, concrete results and it was recommended that it continue its work. This is a validation of the Committee's work, your work, and I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their support during this evaluation process.

To move forward in a coordinated way, to provide member States

with policy support, and to set a standard for our region, this Committee has been working to develop a framework convention for sustainable housing in the UNECE region. It underlined the need for such an international instrument to promote sustainable housing and advance the dialogue and policies for sustainable housing.

At its seventy-third session in 2012, you, the Committee on Housing and Land Management, after three years of work and reflection, recommended that the UNECE Executive Committee move forward and form an international negotiating group to try to agree on the details of this convention. This has been discussed at the UNECE Executive Committee and a number of member States have indicated they could not take a position on the Convention at this time. It is, of course, up to member States. However, in the light of the considerable benefits that a Framework Convention could bring, the secretariat hopes that a thorough consideration will be given by member States to the development of this Convention.

Our work in the future must continue to be focused and results-oriented. Now more than before, we – member States and the secretariat – operate with limited resources. This means that our priorities need to be clearly defined and our work needs to have clear targets and outcomes.

One of the main outcomes of your meetings over the next 3 days will be a strategy for sustainable housing and land management for 2014 to 2020. This strategy sets out a framework to achieve our goals, including:

- Encouraging more energy-efficient, environmentally-friendly and disaster-resistant housing;
- Improving access for all, including the disabled, to adequate, affordable, healthy and secure housing;
- Encouraging investment in housing, efficient management of housing stock, and well-functioning land markets;
- Encouraging efficient land use in rural and urban areas; and
- Promoting security of tenure and the protection of property rights as part of well-functioning land management systems.

The results from implementing this strategy will guide member States in developing national laws, programmes, strategies and policies. It will serve as a basis for coordinating actions and provide a framework to evaluate and compare programmes and results. The strategy will also contribute to the 2016 third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development, known as HABITAT III.

The Committee on Housing and Land Management has a mandate, *“to promote the sustainable development of human settlements in the UNECE region while fostering economic and social prosperity and supporting democratic governance”*. With this mandate it will assist member States in implementing the afore-mentioned strategy through its work in four key areas: (i) sustainable housing and real estate markets; (ii) sustainable urban development; (iii) land

administration and management; and (iv) the publication of country profiles on housing and land management. The Committee provides guidance and support to member States through its action plans, guidelines, workshops and training events.

I look forward to working with all of you in the days and years to come in order to achieve better housing and land management throughout our region.

Thank you.
