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Statement

**on behalf of Mr. Sven ALKALAJ
Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

delivered by

**Mr. Andrey VASILYEV
Deputy Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**at the Committee on Housing and Land Management
and its Ministerial Meeting**

Geneva, 8 October 2013

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Ministerial Meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Housing and Land Management.

We are here today with three main goals:

- first, to take stock of the progress our member States have made in developing sustainable housing and land management systems;
- second to learn about the needs of member States as they work to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow; and,
- third, to agree on a strategy that member States, the United Nations and all of our partners can implement to meet these needs.

I encourage everyone to keep these goals in mind as we work together here today.

The first Ministerial Meeting on Human Settlements was held in September 2000. At that meeting, the Ministers adopted the *"ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century"*.

In September 2006, Ministers responsible for housing, spatial planning and land administration met for the second time and adopted a *"Ministerial Declaration on Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas in the UNECE Region"*.

This Declaration reconfirmed many of the goals and challenges contained in the UNECE Strategy. Ministers decided, at the same time, to convene the next high-level meeting after a few years in order to assess progress in the implementation of these commitments.

Today, we are here to make that assessment.

We know in advance, however, that in spite of progress, a wide range of key challenges still remain.

Housing and land management systems are as diverse as the UNECE region itself, as are the challenges which confront them.

What are some of these challenges?

- Much of our region is cold. This means that temperature control in buildings is not a luxury, but a necessity for survival. Member States spend tremendous amounts of resources on heating and this, combined with the need for climate change mitigation, makes energy efficiency in buildings a top priority.

- Everywhere, livelihoods were affected by the crash in property prices and financial markets in 2008 and 2009; these radical changes in property markets heralded new changes in regulation. The sudden drop in income also emphasized the need for social and affordable housing for those in need.
- Many citizens in our region, in both the east and the west, live in informal or illegal housing. This often results in insecure property rights for residents and interferes with the functioning of real estate markets where it can be difficult to buy and sell these homes.
- Cities throughout our region have a long history and great cultural wealth, much of which is preserved in buildings. This also means that many cities have grown responding to immediate opportunities, rather than following a master plan, and this poses special challenges for spatial planning and urban development.
- Land registration and mapping systems need to continue to evolve in order to provide better services to customers. Every country has its own institutions, and we need to examine their strengths and weaknesses in order to identify what works best in which situations.
- Apartment buildings and condominiums are often poorly managed. Especially in areas where private property rights are a relatively new phenomenon, the roles of owners and other actors in maintaining communal spaces and building infrastructure can be poorly-defined or not defined at all.

The draft strategy for sustainable housing and land management in the ECE region for 2014-2020, which you will discuss this afternoon, provides a **framework** for addressing these challenges – one that member States and the UNECE can follow to help improve housing and land management throughout our region, with targets that we will try to achieve by 2020. At the UNECE, we work with member States to produce guidelines, hold training sessions and develop workshops and conferences to address the challenges facing the housing sector, including all of those that I mentioned earlier.

We work closely with Governments to provide guidance for the region.

We also

- produce action plans to create more energy efficient housing,
- develop best practices for regularizing informal settlements,
- develop guidelines on social housing provision,
- and more.

Our work evolves to meet the changing priorities and needs of member States.

Furthermore, we have supported the inquiries that member States have made into a possible framework convention on sustainable housing in the ECE region.

This convention could provide a set of standards and guidelines for sustainable housing. If countries in the UNECE region finally agree to begin negotiations on this framework convention, it could lead to the development of a set of principles, goals and measures for addressing key housing issues.

Today, we will hear from many of you about the challenges and opportunities in your countries.

We welcome the opportunity for this important, high-level exchange and for us to learn from you.

The discussions today, and the strategy that has been developed by member States, will guide our work for years to come.

I thank all of you for coming here today, and wish you a successful meeting.
