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Statement

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

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

at

the swearing-in-ceremony with the UN Secretary-General

Geneva, 2 October 2014

Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

Mr. Secretary-General let me first thank you sincerely for my appointment. I feel very privileged to have joined the United Nations. It is for me the world's finest workplace. It is the best job I have ever had.

I am especially proud to join the UN Economic Commission for Europe and happy to have been sworn in, not only in the presence of high level UN officials but also in the presence of my good UNECE colleagues.

UNECE is, as Michael Møller expressed it when I first spoke to him, an undiscovered pearl within the UN system. For more than 60 years UNECE has helped countries to come together and to cooperate, even under the most difficult circumstances during the cold war, with remarkable results in a broad range of areas that have a direct impact on people's lives. When you put a child in a safe child seat in your car, buy fruits, vegetables or a piece of meat, drive a car or truck across Europe, enjoy the fresh air or the forests, engage in improving your environment or build an energy-efficient house, you benefit from the hundreds of policy recommendations, standards, conventions that have been developed under the auspices of UNECE. Global goals and policy discussions have been turned into practical standards and guidelines that are used by countries all over the world. We turn sustainable development into global public goods.

This task will become even more important when we hopefully soon have a set of ambitious Sustainable Development Goals. The most ambitious goals ever.

We can experience in our lifetime the eradication of extreme poverty and give billions of citizens a life in safety and dignity. It would be a historic achievement. But to get there we need to transform the goals into policies, practical progress, binding agreements and actions.

Take the area of road safety, where we in a moment will make our personal commitment. More than 1.2 million people die every year from road accidents - of these, more than 250,000 children, many of them on the way to and from school.

One of the proposed targets of the Sustainable Development Goals is to halve the number of deaths from road accidents. This target can be met. If countries of the world signed on to and implemented the 58 legally binding agreements in transport, had clear road signs and implemented the close to 150 vehicle standards – from safety belts and airbags to proper brakes and lights – hundreds of thousands of lives could be saved. We know how to do it. The policies and standards are ready because of work done in the UNECE.

Similarly we strive to convert global goals and targets for energy, environment, water, transport, and forests into concrete recommendations, standards, statistics, conventions that can be and are used by countries in our region – from Vladivostok to Alaska - and also in the rest of the world. We do not only produce these global public goods, we also give policy advice and assist countries in implementing them and take action at the national level.

The vision behind UNECE dates back to 1947. It is a simple one but a strong one. By helping countries to convene and cooperate on a number of very concrete issues, we build peace and progress. It is a vision that has worked for

Europe for decades. It is a vision that is still needed, as we witness turmoil and tensions rising once again within our region.

And it is a vision I strongly believe in and that I, and all my good colleagues in UNECE, will do our very best to contribute to. We will work closely with our member States. We will strengthen our ties with the other UN organizations and regional commissions with a spirit of building one UN. We will promote stronger partnerships with private companies, civil society, academia, experts and citizens. And we will be guided throughout by the four key principles of accountability, participation, transparency and equality in all that we do.

UNECE is indeed an undiscovered pearl. But as our staff representative, Elizabeth James, said at our Town Hall meeting recently, we are now polishing the pearl. Let me promise, Mr. Secretary-General, that the pearl will shine upon the UN and continue to create strong and concrete results for all UN member States and for citizens all over the world.

Thank you.
