

Closing Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller
United Nations Under-Secretary General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

“Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region”

Palais des Nations, Room XVII
Tuesday, 25 April 2017
17h45 – 18h00

Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to be here with you this evening to mark the closure of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region. Today's event demonstrates the vital role that regional actors play in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Reaching its 17 Sustainable Development Goals will depend on our ability to collaborate at each level of political interaction: local, national, regional and global. Your work here today will form the building blocks for global action during the July 2017 High-Level Political Forum in New York, which will take stock of our collective work on the SDGs.

By bringing together Member States at varying levels of development with the regional UN system, civil society and private sector representatives, the Regional Forum does more than just facilitate collaboration. It serves as a veritable laboratory of ideas and best practices, which can then be shared with the wider world. The UNECE Region is particularly well-suited to contribute to the SDGs in this manner. With 56 Member States on three continents, UNECE has managed for 70 years to bridge divides of every kind to advance the collective well-being of its people.

UNECE's convening power and established relations with a broad range of regional and sub-regional actors also help to further strengthen collaboration among international organisations and to provide more joint and coherent support to Member States. The active participation of the regional UN family and other international organisations in today's discussions shows that the will to break down traditional barriers is there.

I hope that UNECE will send to New York not only the results of today's forum, but also the message of the spirit of cooperation that lives in this region.

And as we bring this event to a close, we naturally want to ensure that what was discussed here takes root. When it comes to working on the SDGs, I invite you to look also at the fertile ground here, in Geneva. If New York is the political centre of the international system, then Geneva is its operational hub. This status is the product of the close cohabitation in the Greater Lake Geneva region of about 100 international organizations, more than 400 NGOs, a vibrant private sector and world class academic institutions. As is the case in "Silicon

Valley" with respect to advanced technologies, this concentration of human capital and institutional know-how creates a conducive space for innovation, cross-cutting collaboration and collective action on the SDGs. Leveraging this potential, however, will require all of us to reimagine the way we think and work. In this, the United Nations Office at Geneva is ready to help in three ways.

First, the SDGs require us to transcend traditional divides and break through bureaucratic silos. Since the SDGs are interconnected – with action on one SDG impacting another – we need to be aware of the capacities of our partners, learn to collaborate from planning to implementation and share best practices. To that end, the wider UN System has much to offer with a wealth of expertise on the SDGs found across International Geneva. The recently launched SDG Lab, in my Office, is an initiative to leverage this multi-sectoral expertise found in Geneva and beyond by creating opportunities for cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration, connecting potential partners to address operational challenges, amplifying practices that demonstrate impact at country level and encouraging innovation, both at policy and at operational levels.

Second, as we all strive to break down sector silos, we also need to bridge the gap between the country and global levels. Our new SDG Lab is at your disposal to help you with that. It is a space meant for all development actors to exchange best practices with demonstrated impact with partners across the world. Today's meeting has highlighted many successful practices, as well as challenges, in implementing the SDGs. We now have to ensure that this wealth of information does not stay in this room! We will provide every support in ensuring that this knowledge is strategically disseminated, so that it is (1) used to further scale-up what works and (2) used to identify new partnerships that could address the challenges.

Third, as the Sustainable Development Goals are universal, success will depend on our ability to engage the broadest coalition possible on the SDGs and to communicate their relevance to the lives of people in all walks of life. To that end, the Perception Change Project has developed innovative ways and structures to raise the level of awareness of the SDGs in our region and beyond. These new tools and capacities are also at your disposal.

For the last 70 years, UNECE and International Geneva have contributed to each other's success. Both show what can be achieved if we cooperate on issues that no single state or actor can handle on its own, if we learn to embrace partnerships and collaboration. I and my colleagues look forward to work with all of you on that in the years to come.

Thank you.