

Opening statement

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**at the meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the European Agreement
on the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR)**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you today and to welcome you in Geneva to this Conference of the Parties to the European Agreement on the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR).

The ADR was one of the first agreements concluded in Geneva after the establishment of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 1947. It was done in 1957 and entered into force 11 years later, following the accession of the first five Contracting Parties as required by its article 7. The number of Parties has risen significantly since then. With Morocco joining in 2001, Tunisia in 2008 and Nigeria in October 2018, the ADR now has 51 Contracting Parties.

The technical annexes of the ADR have been updated every two years since 1997, to adapt to technological and industrial progress. In 1968, these annexes already included more than 200 pages of provisions. Today, they contain more than 1500 pages of provisions for the safe transport of dangerous goods. Adaptation to technological and industrial progress, health and environmental concerns, lessons learnt from accidents and even certain international events unrelated to the transport

of dangerous goods have played a role in the improvement and development of ADR. These include the tragedy of Los Alfaques in Spain in 1978, where about 270 people died and 300 people were injured by the blast and fireball generated from an exploding portable tank that carried flammable gas. This drew international attention to the importance of measures to ensure the safe transport of dangerous goods: training of drivers, tank fillers and other persons involved, restrictions on transport through populated areas, and portable tank construction requirements among others. The September 11 attacks influenced the introduction of provisions on the security of transport of dangerous goods. The mad-cow crisis led to specific requirements for the safe transport of infectious material in bulk. And more recently, increasing use of lithium cells, batteries and fuel cells has been accompanied by the development of provisions to ensure their safe transport: either for use, recycling or disposal.

The efficiency of ADR would be limited if its provisions were not harmonized with those applicable to other means of transport. Road transport represents quite often only one leg of the journey. Dangerous goods may start their journey on the road, but then get transported by rail, sea or air to a different country before being loaded onto a road vehicle again to reach their final destination. Harmonising the provisions on transport of dangerous goods by all modes is crucially important, in order to ensure safety throughout the journey and avoid unnecessary barriers and delays.

It is very difficult to measure prevention. Thus, it is not easy to provide concrete figures showing how implementing the ADR has reduced the number of deaths from accidents involving transport of dangerous goods. Emergency-responders are saved because they can identify from the distance the dangerous goods carried by looking at the identifying orange plates and marks on vehicles. Spillages or releases of hazardous materials are avoided. People are saved thanks to the restrictions applicable to the transport of dangerous goods through tunnels or populated areas. Incidents involving ADR vehicles carrying dangerous goods often result in non or

minimum spillage, no people injured, and in many cases, no significant damage to the cargo, people or the environment. On the other hand, where ADR provisions are not applied, accidents often have catastrophic consequences.

The benefits of ADR in road safety should not be limited to the existing Contracting Parties. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 expects a 50 per cent reduction of road fatalities by 2020. But road traffic deaths number 1.35 million a year globally and many countries are still suffering the social, economic and environmental consequences from unsafe transport of dangerous goods.

The role and importance of ADR in facilitating road safety at the global, regional and national levels was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its Resolution 70/260 on improving global road safety. It encourages Member States that have not yet done so to consider becoming Contracting Parties to the UN legal instruments on road safety, including the ADR, and to apply, implement and promote their provisions.

The Inland Transport Committee (ITC) is the highest intergovernmental authority of UNECE in transport. In February 2019, it adopted its strategy until 2030. The ITC Strategy aims to facilitate global participation in the legal transport instruments administered by UNECE.

Today, you will consider a proposal to align the current title of the Agreement with the provisions of its article 6, by removing the word “European” from the title on the understanding that this may facilitate accession of States for which the word “European” represents an obstacle.

I note that this proposal arose from discussions held within the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (WP.15) on developing ADR and supporting the implementation of the SDGs, in particular, those related to road safety and

environmentally sound management of chemicals by significantly reducing their release to air, water and soil.

I invite you to take this commitment even further. We can take a decision that can help countries to significantly enhance road safety, reduce accidents involving dangerous goods and minimize their consequences. ADR is the model to follow for road transport of dangerous goods. WP.15 has a unique opportunity to strengthen its leadership role on this area and help enhance the development of safe provisions for road transport of dangerous goods in other regions. It is important that people in all countries benefit from the experience and know-how accumulated by ADR Contracting Parties over the last 63 years.

To conclude, let me wish you a successful conference. Your work and the decisions you take are important and have a significant impact on people's lives and health, the economy and the environment.

Thank you.
