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**Statement**

**by**

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**at the**

**40th anniversary Special Session at the 39th session of the Executive Body to the Convention  
on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution**

**Geneva, 11 December 2019**

Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to you to the 40th Anniversary Special Session of the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

40 years ago, acid rain was destroying forests, killing fish in lakes and threatening ecosystems in the Northern hemisphere. Scientists had found the culprit – air pollutants emitted thousands of kilometers away from where it was raining.

40 years ago, representatives of thirty-two UNECE countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain gathered in this very building, and signed the first legally-binding international treaty to address the issue of air pollution.

This was the treaty that turned acid rain from an environmental disaster into a success story. And it did not stop there. Looking back over the 40 years of the Convention's existence, the list of achievements is impressive.

Since its entry into force, the Convention has been extended by eight protocols to cover almost all the major air pollutants – sulphur, nitrogen, volatile organic compounds, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, ammonia and particulate matter and emission sources – fossil fuel-fired power plants, agriculture, vehicles, industry, domestic stoves and more.

Parties have reduced sulphur emissions by about 80% since 1990, and nitrogen emissions by 40%. Particulate matter concentrations declined by around a third

between 2000 and 2012. The number of days on which ozone concentrations exceed WHO guidelines is now 20% lower than in 1990.

As the use of cleaner technologies in industry and transport within the UNECE region has increased, the costs of applying them have declined. We have witnessed a decoupling of economic growth and air pollution trends. This decoupling has prevented 600,000 premature deaths annually. Average life expectancy has increased by 12 months. Acidification has been halted and lakes and forest soils are recovering.

Over the past 40 years, the Convention has been the undeniable leader in addressing air pollution. Beyond the issue of acidification, eutrophication and tropospheric ozone, it also addressed issues of global concern – those of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals. It broke new ground with the signature of the protocols on POPs and heavy metals in 1998 and paved the way for global action on these issues through the Stockholm and Minamata Conventions.

The Convention is remarkable for tackling the issue of air pollution in an integrated manner. Today we also celebrate the recent entry into force of the amendments to the Gothenburg Protocol - the first protocol based on the innovative multi-pollutant and multi-effects approach developed under the Convention. Furthermore, through these amendments, it became the first instrument to introduce legally binding commitments for reduction of PM emissions, including measures for black carbon. This is a first step towards much-needed integrated policy-making to address air pollution and climate change - two sides of the same coin.

The Convention is unique in the way that it brings together scientists and policymakers. This has allowed policy makers to have an insight into the facts and the

science underpinning their policies. At the same time, it has allowed scientists to understand what further scientific investigations are necessary for the needs of policy-making, thus bringing advances to both science and policy. Over 40 years, the Convention has built a robust scientific network involving over 1,000 scientists working on various aspects such as atmospheric and ecosystems effects monitoring, modelling, emission data, technological solutions, cost estimates, and others. Many long-standing partners, from Parties, the UN system, and other organizations are involved and are also here today. I take this opportunity to thank the scientists for their contribution and encourage them to continue to provide cutting-edge science in support of the Convention. The science-policy interface will continue to be crucial for the long-term success of the Convention.

I've talked a lot about the past. Let me now look into the future. Despite the success achieved so far, there are still many challenges ahead:

Further reduction in ozone precursors, including methane, will be required to reduce the ozone levels. And studies tell us that reductions in the UNECE region alone may not be sufficient.

The WHO guidelines for particulate matter are substantially exceeded in many parts of the UNECE region, especially in urban areas. Cities cannot reduce air pollution levels to the WHO guideline levels on their own.

The disruption of the global and regional nitrogen cycles is one of the most important challenges for environmental policy. It requires an integrated policy response, involving the agricultural, transport, energy and other sectors.

The Convention has a huge role to play in addressing these challenges. Today, through the anniversary declaration that we will endorse, we will renew our commitment to work on reducing emissions further to achieve better air quality in the region.

While the Air Convention is a regional instrument, the scientific work under the Convention has shown that we cannot solve the problems in our region alone, due to the intercontinental movement of air pollution. Countries and regions in other parts of the world are also facing severe air pollution problems. We believe that the Convention, as a framework, is a great model that could be used in other regions. The Convention is willing to share its experience. The scientific tools, models, data, monitoring methods, guidance documents and best practices developed under the Convention are available to everyone in the world. They can also provide an excellent basis for coordinated action between different regions, for the benefit of the global environment.

UNECE is very proud to have accompanied this important agreement over the last 4 decades, and to celebrate with all of you today. I take this opportunity to thank Parties for their commitments and cooperation and wish them success in their continued efforts. These efforts will also make a significant contribution toward of the SDGs, notably those promoting healthy lives and well-being, food security and sustainable agriculture, safe and sustainable cities, sustainable and modern energy sources and terrestrial ecosystems.

The Convention has been one of the most successful examples of international cooperation in environmental policy. We still have many challenges and problems to solve, but there are also many opportunities for taking action. It is up to us all to take

these opportunities and continue the success of the Convention in the next decades. I wish us an inspiring anniversary event.

Thank you for your attention.