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Statement

by

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at

**DIALOGUE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES OF THE REGIONAL
COMMISSIONS WITH THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE UN GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

**“Catalyzing transformative actions and integrated approaches to sustainable
development: regional experiences to accelerate progress on the SDGs”
(remote participation)**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The assessment of SDG progress shows that we are not on track to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

In recent years, the world -and our region- have been hit by several shocks that have created a more difficult context to advance in the implementation of the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic, the war against Ukraine and persistent economic uncertainty have darkened sustainable development prospects. At the same time, the cost of inaction and the exposure of our societies to multiple risks have become increasingly apparent.

In these challenging circumstances, redoubling our efforts and increasing the effectiveness of our actions are critical to reclaim the lost ground.

We have a long way to go but we have also made significant advances.

This is not time for despair but time to give a new impulse to our collective work, drawing inspiration from the renewed commitments made at the recent SDG Summit, which reaffirmed the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development.

In the UNECE region, addressing the unresolved conflict between increased short-term economic prosperity and long-term environmental sustainability remains a persistent challenge.

The time to tackle this conflict is shrinking dramatically.

The immediate impacts of climate change, pollution and unsustainable resource management are already affecting our economies and the health of the population.

We need far reaching and rapid changes, in our energy, food and transport systems.

We need new approaches in the way we produce and consume, such as circularity, so we reduce our environmental footprint.

Acceleration requires identifying actions that take advantage of existing synergies among SDGs, which, according to most analyses, including the recent Global Sustainable Development Report, are stronger than trade-offs.

Drawing attention to the co-benefits of our actions on climate change, on biodiversity and on many other pressing challenges is also important to overcome resistance to the necessary transformations and to develop partnerships between different actors.

Policy coherence and integrated approaches are essential for achieving progress.

Please let me further explore some specific ideas around these questions, while introducing some of the work UNECE is carrying out.

Air pollution has large health and economic costs, inflicting damage to forests

and reducing agricultural yields. These negative effects are well documented in the work under the UNECE Air Convention, which has contributed to significant declines in pollutants over the last decades, thus reducing associated mortality. The quality of air depends not only on local conditions but on events that may be thousands of kilometers away. The presence of these negative, far-reaching externalities means that international cooperation is critical.

Cost-effective reduction of pollutants requires integrating different environmental concerns such as climate change, biodiversity loss, energy, transport, agricultural and nitrogen management policies.

Air pollution is closely associated to the use of fossil fuels. Our work to increase the uptake of renewables, to decarbonize the transport sector and to improve the energy efficiency of buildings contributes to reduce pollution. At the same time, it advances other goals, including climate change mitigation and improved economic performance.

The PEP – the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme – focusses on the linkages between these three areas and promotes new mobility solutions that reduce the negative impact of transport and contribute to positive health outcomes. It relies on integrated approaches and cross-sectoral coordination.

Water management requires also integrated approaches, that incorporate a transboundary dimension. Climate change will have negative consequences for

water supply and quality that will test existing systems and increase the need for cooperation. UNECE is ready to support Member States in the follow up of the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Water is essential for life and critical for many economic activities. A water-food-energy nexus is key to jointly address diverse challenges as part of effective climate action and the green transition. Globally, almost 90% of the electricity generated comes from systems that depend on water availability. Throughout the region, UNECE has promoted this nexus approach, bringing to fruition collaborative efforts to foster sustainable energy and water management practices in various basins.

Investment is the driver for change. More financial resources are necessary, but these need to be efficiently used. UNECE provides normative frameworks that can facilitate the alignment of financial resources with SDGs. Prime among them is the UNECE PPP – Public Private Partnership for the SDGs approach; its project assessment methodology is being used for evaluating infrastructure projects for their SDG contributions. Among others, UNECE, together with beneficiary countries and regional development banks, is using this methodology to evaluate PPP infrastructure projects responding to the climate crisis or supporting the re-construction in Ukraine.

Furthermore, the Aarhus Convention on access to environmental information and the Espoo Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context are routinely used by regional development banks and

other actors to inform their investment decisions.

Asia and Europe are home to 14 LLDCs that grapple with particular sustainable development challenges owing to their lack of direct territorial access to the sea. Remoteness from major markets and limited infrastructure increase their transportation costs, hindering their full participation in international trade and posing significant economic challenges. UN transport conventions and trade facilitation tools administered by UNECE can significantly lower costs, open new economic opportunities and boost connectivity as drivers for sustainable development.

The United Nations Resource Management System which was developed by UNECE and was recently endorsed by ECOSOC, provides a set of principles and requirements that guide the planning, design, operation and closure of resource extraction and processing activities, to balance economic development, environmental sustainability and social responsibility. This common language will help to drive investment in these sectors, while allowing investors to focus on environmental, social and governance aspects. It incorporates a participatory process that enables stakeholders to integrate and balance various considerations, from poverty alleviation to climate change. The green transition is fueling minerals demand; integrated management of these resources is therefore an area of utmost importance.

We need integrated approaches, the resources to put them in practice but, ultimately, we need to engage multiple partners into action. UNECE's work seeks to widen the space for cooperation by involving different actors and

becoming catalysts for broader change.

Local action is critical to address basic sustainable development issues such as waste management, mobility or air pollution. As our world becomes more urbanized, the centrality of local action to advance sustainable development will become even more prominent.

Local authorities should therefore be engaged in the national and global efforts to reach the SDGs. UNECE is committed to putting into action the vision of “a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations” put forth by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Our annual Forum of Mayors, which met for the third time earlier this month, has now become fully integrated in our intergovernmental structures and provides a regular space for the exchange of experiences and developing new partnerships.

We have also elaborated voluntary local reviews guidelines which will encourage local efforts for sustainable development and help local authorities in assessing progress. Incorporating the local dimension in sustainable development policies contributes to enhance policy coherence.

To conclude – we are ready to work with you to deliver the transformations needed across multiple areas by developing normative outputs, providing policy advice and, importantly, delivering the technical assistance required.

This is a time for joined-up thinking and for joint efforts. You can count on us.
