

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Statement**

**by**

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**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

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**at**

**Geneva Trade Week**

**S24 “Harnessing Trade as a Means for Strengthening Agenda 2030/SDGs – The Case of  
WTO Accession”**

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, good morning.

It is a great pleasure for UNECE co-organize this session with the Accessions Division of the WTO and the permanent missions of Belarus and Kazakhstan. I am especially happy to be here today with Ambassador Yuri Ambrazevich of Belarus, who is the Chair of UNECE, and with Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhanova of Kazakhstan. We have great cooperation with both your countries on trade topics, as Kazakhstan chairs and Belarus vice-chairs the UNECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity. Today's event is yet another fruit of this cooperation, so thank you both and also to the WTO colleagues for the excellent organization.

Special appreciation also goes to the Geneva Trade Platform for gathering various stakeholders to discuss matters relevant to the global economy. Such initiatives are needed now more than ever given the unprecedented crisis we face.

My remarks today will highlight the importance of mainstreaming sustainability and resilience in trade at large, and in WTO accessions specifically.

According to the ILO, 400 million full-time jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020. An estimated 71 million people are expected to be pushed into extreme poverty this year<sup>1</sup>. This highlights the need for deep reforms towards a sustainable and resilient economic recovery – one that leaves nobody behind. Of course, these are exactly the goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I thus reiterate to all of you the urgency of putting our energies towards the SDGs. Trade, and trade policy, have an important role to play in this context. And I want to highlight two overarching factors:

One, the SDGs are **interlinked**. We have to account for this in our work. For example, sustainable trade reforms can promote inclusive growth, job creation and poverty reduction, thus contributing

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<sup>1</sup> [SDG report 2020](#)

to the achievement of many SDGs. Conversely, mainstreaming SDGs into trade policy can foster inclusive and sustainable trade. UNECE tools and products, such as our regulatory studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, support member States in this context and help resolve bottlenecks in trade flows.

The second factor is **circularity**. We have finite resources. Unless we incorporate circularity concerns into all phases of design, use, reuse, recycling and disposal, we will not reach the sustainable future that we want. In recognition of this, UNECE member States decided that the theme of our next Commission session will be “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region”. I invite you to join us at that event, which will take place on 20 – 21 April 2021. Trade and economic cooperation are important levers to foster a broad and wide-spread circular transition. Therefore, UNECE’s work on trade and circular economy, including on traceability and transparency for sustainable value chains and preventing food loss and waste, will be among the topics discussed.

In line SDG 17 on partnerships, UNECE is committed to working with WTO and other multilateral and regional institutions, and supporting the accession of transition economies to the WTO.

The accession process fosters the structural transformation, modernization and diversification of economies in transition. 16 UNECE member States have already acceded to the WTO. 6 are acceding, and one is an observer. We have a long record of supporting this process. But we can do even more.

As a UN Regional Commission, UNECE can help harness the power of regional and also sub-regional integration. A concrete example here is SPECA, the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. Its members are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In 2019, they adopted the SPECA Principles on Sustainable Trade, setting in motion a concrete work-stream to make trade more sustainable. We are

delighted to support them on this important, forward-looking work. Under the SPECA umbrella, UNECE and the WTO Accession Division have worked together in the past and we look forward to doing more.

Let me conclude by highlighting the clear merit of exploring synergies and cross-fertilization between organizations. Acceding countries face significant challenges, now exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, we see great value in joining forces, and collaborating with the WTO and other international organizations to assist governments. I offer you the full commitment of UNECE. Let us work together to make sustainable and resilient trade a reality.

Thank you.