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Statement

by

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at

**Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) side-event at UNEA-6
“Action to deliver cleaner air and climate mitigation for the health of people and
planet”**

Wednesday, 28 February 2024, 18.30-19.45

Press Room

Excellences, distinguished participants, dear friends,

Thank you very much for inviting me to this important event, highlighting a topic that is so central to tackling the triple planetary crisis.

As we have heard already, air pollution remains the world's largest environmental health threat. It is high time that we redouble our efforts to tackle this problem, and we have to tackle it together.

In the UNECE region, which covers North America, Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, we have done this for 45 years and it has led to concrete results. With 51 Parties, the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. is unique in that it provides an international legally binding agreement, setting emission reduction targets for a number of pollutants. In addition, the science-policy interface has created a common scientific understanding. The Convention also monitors compliance of Parties and supports countries in capacity building.

To this day, the results of collective efforts by Parties have been remarkable: emissions of air pollutants have been reduced by 40% (for particulate matter) to 80% (for sulphur) since 1990 in the UNECE region. 600.000 lives have been saved annually in Europe. The air we breathe today in Europe and North America is much cleaner than it was 45 years ago.

That said, recent scientific findings have shown that Parties cannot rest on their laurels. This is why they have decided to start negotiations to revise the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-

level Ozone, the so-called Gothenburg Protocol, with the aim to increase efforts to reduce air pollution further.

While the experience of the Convention has shown that regional cooperation is key to tackle air pollution, science has also shown that one region cannot do it alone. It is precisely because air pollution knows no borders that cooperation with other regions is very important.

Under our Air Convention, Parties established a Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution, with the goal of creating a platform for mutual learning and sharing the Convention's experience and technical expertise with other regions. We will hear more about this in the panel discussion.

In the same spirit, we are also happy that the proposed resolution on 'Promoting regional cooperation to improve air quality globally' is on the UNEA agenda.

In this regard, I would also like to highlight the important work that has been carried out to reduce air pollution in the framework of other UN Regional Commissions.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific launched the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution in 2022. The first of its kind in the region, the Programme promotes science-based, policy-oriented cooperation, and aims to develop an open regional platform for air quality improvement.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is working with the Intergovernmental Network on Atmospheric Pollution for Latin America and Caribbean to promote actions on clean air.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa, with the African Union Commission and UN partners, has launched the Continental Circular Economy Action Plan (2024-2034), which seeks to address waste, pollution, and biodiversity loss. UNECA has also implemented a pilot project to promote clean cooking in rural Ethiopia to reduce the exposure of women and girls to indoor particulate pollution.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia supports Arab States to advance circular economy principles and emission reduction efforts through energy efficiency and renewables. There are also regional collaborative efforts to assess the effects of sand and dust storms, which are becoming more intense due to land degradation, desertification and climate change.

Let me finish by saying this: It was not that obvious that international cooperation to reduce air pollution among UNECE Member States would succeed in the 70s and 80s, at a time when diplomatic relations in the UNECE region were not the friendliest. The Convention managed to overcome these differences and made regional cooperation around this topic possible. This is encouraging for other regions that aspire to work together on clean air. Differences can be overcome and UNECE would be glad to share its experiences in this regard.

Thank you.
