

**Statement by the Executive Secretary on the occasion of Lions Day
Geneva, 10 April 2019**

“Protecting our Future: The Health of our Children”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address you on the occasion of Lions Day. Thank you for this kind invitation.

You asked me to reflect on the theme: “Protecting our Future: The Health of our Children”. I will be delighted to share with you what we do in the organization that I lead, the Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE for short. And I am sure you will see many commonalities in our joint commitment to causes that I know, Lions International has been supporting for many decades.

UNECE is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. We are known for our work on policy frameworks and regulatory standards, including on a sound environment and human health. Today, I would like to tell you more about how UNECE supports its member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are contributing to SDG3, “healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages”, through several instruments.

One is the European Environment and Health Process, in which UNECE has been involved for over 20 years under the overall leadership of WHO. The process has made a real difference in our region and has led to a number of important legal instruments. I would like to mention two of them here today, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP for short) and the Protocol on Water and Health.

Among many other things, the Protocol on Water and Health focuses on equitable access to water and sanitation, including for vulnerable groups such as children.

Countries in the UNECE region are provided with tools to meet the special needs of boys and girls. For example, we want to ensure that every child has access to soap and water in educational facilities throughout the region and that girls have access to menstrual hygiene products in schools.

THE PEP links transport, health and the environment by promoting clean and healthy transport. Road transport generates up to 50 per cent of air pollution in urban areas. Therefore, THE PEP promotes cleaner, more environmentally friendly transport policies, including walking and cycling. These active forms of transport are also key to the fight against health issues such as obesity and diabetes, especially in children.

Let me talk a bit more about air pollution: We now know that it is a silent killer, contributing to 7 million premature deaths annually. Air pollution has been linked to many different types of diseases, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Air quality is therefore a significant environmental factor of human health, and of children's health in particular.

In recognition of this fact, UNECE works to improve air quality through the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. It celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year. A great deal has been done under the Convention to improve air quality in the region. We have achieved emissions reductions of 40 to 80 per cent, and the recovery of forest soils and lakes. This translates to the prevention of 600,000 premature deaths every year.

Another environmental factor that affects health are industrial accidents. Such accidents can release chemical substances into the air, soil or water, causing deaths and injuries, as well as diseases and health defects that can persist in the long term. The UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents supports member States in preventing, and reducing the frequency and gravity of such accidents.

We also host the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. It ensures that environmental and health aspects are considered in all plans and programmes of central and local governments. This preventive approach helps to protect health and minimize damage to the environment for our children. For example, the Protocol worked with the town of Orhei in the Republic of Moldova to review their planning processes in order to avoid or mitigate negative health impacts. Concretely, this means monitoring of air quality in the city center and on national highways, developing drainage systems to reduce water pollution, etc.

I would like to close by mentioning one of the biggest killers of our times – road accidents. 1.35 million people die on roads every year – more than die of AIDS. And traffic injuries are the number one cause of death of persons aged five to 29. UNECE hosts over 10 UN Transport Conventions that directly address key road safety systems, such as helmet use, harmonization of road signs, vehicle standards etc. In fact, without knowing it, those of you who drive touch our work every day – we bring governments, experts and industry together to develop standards and regulations for most safety components in your car, from child seats and seatbelts to braking systems. Our regulation for the Advanced Emergency Braking System could save 1000 lives every year in the EU alone. We also have the privilege of hosting the secretariat for the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt. And last year, as a joint effort, we launched the UN Road Safety Trust Fund. In just eight months, the Fund has gathered pledges of USD 19 million. Last November the first five pilot projects were approved, addressing key components of national safety systems in Ethiopia, Senegal, Philippines, Paraguay and South Africa, among others. Your engagement in and contributions to the Trust Fund would be warmly welcome.

Today, I have highlighted just a few of the ways that UNECE’s outputs can protect the health of future generations. We work with governments, national and

local, to assist in their implementation and always welcome partners in this endeavour.

Once again, I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak to you about how my organization is working to protect health, especially that of future generations – that is a task for which we are all responsible. I hope you can work with us to ensure a more sustainable future.

I would like to thank all of you and your members around the world for your commitment to serve and support your fellow human beings. That is indeed an honorable calling, and one that is at the heart of what the United Nations stands for. Thank you for your service.