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**Statement**

**by**

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**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at the**

**Launch of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Belarus  
2 June 2016, Minsk, Belarus**

Your Excellency Prime Minister Kobyakov,  
Your Excellency Minister Kovkhuto,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, Prime Minister Kobyakov and Minister Kovkhuto, for your kind invitation to the launch of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Belarus. For the entire UNECE, I wish to also convey our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and all other governmental authorities for their constructive cooperation in the preparation of this Review.

This is the third EPR in Belarus. And let me start by congratulating Belarus on implementing 84% of the previous EPR recommendations. This impressive number is one of the highest implementation scores amongst all countries participating in the UNECE EPR process. I hope you will continue this excellent track record and strive for a high implementation rate also for this third review.

The Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Belarus assesses your efforts to protect your citizens and communities from adverse effects from pollution and to protect your beautiful and rich nature and the environment.

And the good news is that the EPR shows that the water is cleaner, the forests area and the protected nature area is growing, air pollution from sulfur has decreased substantially, emissions of ozone-depleting substances have been reduced, you have more cars but they are much cleaner and drive more efficiently, the new houses that you build are much more energy efficient and the share of renewable energy has gone up. The growth in industrial waste has increased less than the growth in industrial production showing more attention to waste reduction and management.

Importantly the participation of the public in environmental discussions has increased, access to information on environmental matters improved, and the education on environmental and sustainable development issues has been strengthened in the schools and the education system.

These are just examples of many very good improvements shown in the report.

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But there are also challenges. Pollution from ammonia and heavy metals has gone up and the amount of solid waste is increasing, although this is primarily an effect of better reporting. The involvement of the public in strategic issues can be improved and more could be done to ensure that prices and taxes encourage environmental protection and energy efficiency. There has been a downward trend when it comes to financing of nature protection. And as a keen bicyclist, I have noticed that the EPR recommends doing more to promote bicycling in Minsk. However, I know that bicycle lanes are being constructed. Next time I come I hope I can bike around in this beautiful city.

On all of these issues the report comes with recommendations that can hopefully help Belarus to improve further and tackle the challenges.

On a more strategic level the EPR gives recommendations on how environmental concerns can be integrated into sectoral policies, and how stronger international cooperation can help decouple economic growth from environmental degradation and build a green economy and sustainable development.

Belarus has already implemented many policies relevant to a green economy. These include the promotion of renewable energy sources and improvements in resource efficiency. It is important to continue to push for this transition to a green economy. Countries all over the world are showing that there is no contradiction between environmental protection and economic growth. On the contrary – a green economy is also a strong economy.

Belarus has already a developed system of strategic planning, with the National Strategy for Sustainable Socioeconomic Development at the core. The integration of green economy principles into this Strategy and sectoral legislation has been a very positive achievement. The review encourages further strengthening environmental planning and strategies in all sectors and in bylaws.

For decades cooperation on environmental issues has united our Member States despite tensions and turmoil. The environment knows no borders. It is praised that Belarus has joined several Multilateral Environmental Agreements, but the EPR recommends Belarus to also join:

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- The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention
- The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention
- Three amended protocols to the UNECE Air Convention;
- The Minamata Convention on Mercury (which Belarus signed in 2014);
- Several ILO conventions on hazardous substances.

Belarus should also proceed with the ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. And here I may note that UNECE and UNDP will continue to support the important work on climate change adaptation in the Neman River Basin.

Next week, the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference will take place in Batumi. The Conference has two main themes: greening the economy in the pan-European region and improving air quality for a better environment and human health. Belarus has significant experience to share under both themes. I thank Belarus for joining the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy – the BIG-E - and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air and look forward to implementation of these commitments.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to recall that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals integrate the three pillars of development: Economic, social and environmental. While the EPR places an emphasis on the environment, it also takes an integrated approach by linking this with social and economic concerns. And it looks on how environmental considerations are integrated into various sectors – energy, transport, forestry, tourism, education, human settlements and health. Therefore I hope that the EPR recommendations will assist the Government of Belarus in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank once again the Government of Belarus for organizing this EPR launch, and all of you for participating today. And I congratulate Belarus for a very fine result.

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