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Welcome Message

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

**The Ministerial Conference on the Action Plan for Education for Sustainable
Development in the Mediterranean**

8-9 December 2016

Nicosia, Cyprus

Your Excellency, President of the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Demetris Syllouris],
Your Excellency, the Minister of Education and Culture of Cyprus, Mr. Costas Kadis,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the Children for coming and thank you for your beautiful gifts. And thanks also to the young people for beautiful songs. It was a very fine and touching opening ceremony.

It gives me great pleasure to speak at this Ministerial Conference on the Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean. I wish to express my gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for hosting this Conference and for its leadership in promoting ESD in our part of the world.

We now it from our own children and from all children. And we heard it from the Potamia Primary School of Cyprus. We now how children come home from schools and tell us to save water, turn of the light, plant trees, reuse waste or help the refugees when they have discussed sustainable development in school, when they have understood some of the pressing challenges we have for our planet and our people. They come home full of ideas and eager to find new solutions. This is why Education for Sustainable Development is so important. This is why we must now make sure that every school kid in the world learns about sustainable development and now about the Sustainable Development Goals. And we have promised with the Sustainable Development Goals to do it.

Today you will decide on the next steps in promoting the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD (MSESD), through the adoption of an Action Plan for its practical implementation. On behalf of UNECE, I welcome and commend your efforts in this direction.

For more than ten years, UNECE has actively promoted Education for Sustainable Development under the aegis of the UNECE Steering Committee for ESD. We also have colleagues in this room who have been prominent supporters of this work and I am very

grateful for their contributions. Important advancements were made on policy integration, curricula, tools, resources and networking. Hundreds of initiatives have been launched to integrate ESD into the content and process of formal, non-formal and informal education, moving from policy to practice. ESD is now reflected in the policies and planning for national education and sustainable development in over 90% of reporting member States.

The MSES draft Action Plan clearly recognizes that appropriate education is crucial for Sustainable Development. I fully agree with this statement. We are still fresh from the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference that was held in June in Georgia. In the framework of this Batumi Conference, there took place the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, where His Excellency the Minister of Education and Culture of Cyprus, Mr. Costas Kadis, delivered a keynote speech. I would like to thank you, Minister Kadis, for your active role in the Batumi Ministerial and in the adoption of its important decisions. These decisions reflect the agreed way forward for the whole Pan-European region. They also establish the link between the Batumi and Nicosia Ministerials.

The Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development extends the mandate of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD until 2030 and requests to consider the needs also in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Mediterranean. Therefore, UNECE has clear direction from its member States to work closer with Mediterranean Strategy on ESD, and we are more than willing to do so.

Unfortunately, I must emphasize that the scarcity of resources for the implementation of the UNECE ESD Strategy has become a critical issue, and we are unable to offer the appropriate level of secretarial support. Our proposed activities must be linked to resources. I hope that member States will be able to mobilize sufficient resources to ensure the continued development, consolidation and expansion of ESD in practice. This will allow us to continue our fruitful cooperation at the necessary level in future.

This cooperation is even more important now, when the Mediterranean Region faces so many important challenges. These challenges are not confined to the geographical borders of the region. I find it highly symbolic that - while addressing the needs and problems of the Mediterranean - the draft Action Plan begins with the words “The World as a whole”. The solution to the challenges faced in this region are indeed linked to challenges in the world as a whole. And we know that there are no simple solutions. The only lasting solution is sustainable development – to implement the strong vision expressed by the Sustainable Development Goals. And it starts in our schools.

Thank you for your attention.
