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Statement

by

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at

**the Dialogue of Executive Secretaries with the Second Committee on
“Follow-up to Rio+20: Actions and Considerations at the Regional Level”**

6 November 2012/New York

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Just a few months separate us from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro which reaffirmed the principles of the Rio Declaration of 1992 and adopted our common vision on sustainable development for the future.

Most importantly, it recognized critical interlinkages between economic, social and environment development and put people at the centre of sustainable development.

The Rio+20 outcome document also recognized the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development and urged regional and subregional organizations, including the United Nations regional commissions to play an active role in promoting sustainable development, including through harmonization of relevant development policies, plans and programmes, as well as capacity building, exchange of information, best practices and lessons learned.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was one of the first UN regional commissions established by ECOSOC. It includes 56 countries of North America, Europe and Central Asia. It is the most advanced and diverse region in the world where the UN has minimal presence but an unfinished development agenda.

UNECE supports regional integration and cooperation in two ways:

- Normative work, i. e. development of legal instruments, norms and standards in the areas of transport; statistics, environment; economic cooperation and integration; trade, sustainable energy; timber and forestry; housing and land management, population, and
- Operational work, i.e. technical cooperation aimed at assisting countries with economies in transition to accede to/or implement UNECE legal instruments, norms and standards in these areas.

UNECE legal instruments, norms and standards directly benefit people by improving their access to food, water and sanitation, energy and housing, technology and innovation; by promoting sustainable management of natural (water, forests and land) resources, sustainable urban development, sustainable transport , etc. They promote safe, healthy and environmentally sound lifestyles of people, increase their voice and participation in decision making and improve their quality of life.

The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) celebrated this year its 20th anniversary. Since 1992, the implementation of the Convention in the pan-European region has been successfully tested by economic transition, political tensions, civil unrest and conflicts that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Soviet Union and the break-up of the Yugoslavia. During this time, the Convention has provided a permanent intergovernmental forum for policy dialogue, sharing experience and identifying best practices on transboundary water cooperation. Originally negotiated as a regional instrument, the Convention will become open for accession to all UN Member States in

early 2013 when its 2003 amendments are ratified by all Parties.

Some 140 million people in UNECE region still lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation and 13,000 children under the age of 14 die every year from water-related diseases. The UNECE-WHO Europe Protocol to the Water Convention promotes universal access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Based in the principle on equity and non-discrimination, it represents a unique legal instrument for the realization of the human rights for access to water and sanitation

The Protocol requires that its Parties translate their international obligations into national actions by establishing the water and health nexus, and setting targets in the whole water cycle. It can provide a legal basis for achieving the sustainable development goal (SDG) on water which will integrate economic efficiency, social and health dimension, and environmental protection.

Since I mentioned sustainable development goals I would like to inform you about the work of a Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on measuring sustainable development. The measurement is based on a conceptual framework adopted in 2009 which focuses on monitoring the economic, environmental, human and social capital passed from the current generation to the future generation. The framework has been later extended to include measurement of well-being, quality of life and the transboundary impacts. Thorough analysis of national and international databases will enable the Task Force to identify relevant indicators for monitoring the implementation sustainable development strategies at the national and international levels. The report of the Task Force will be finalized in 2013. We believe it can provide a valuable input to the development of the sustainable development goals, defining targets and their measurement by the Working Group on SDGs.

Sustainable housing is another area of our work. Buildings are responsible for 40 % of primary energy consumption. Retrofitting existing buildings and constructing new “smart” buildings will dramatically reduce energy use and air pollution while creating many new jobs. The UNECE Action Plan for Energy-efficient Housing provides a framework for Governments of the region to overcome barriers to energy efficiency investments in the residential sector. Upon the requests of the governments, UNECE also provides assistance in developing national Action Plans. For example, the National Action Plan for Energy-efficiency Measures in the Residential Sector of Montenegro which was assisted by UNECE identifies over 50 actions related to energy-efficiency infrastructure and legislation, financial infrastructure, energy performance standards and technology integration, access to affordable and energy efficient housing , as well as capacity building, education and awareness-raising. It provides a sound basis for the preparations of the second National Action Plan for Energy Efficiency 2013-2015 by the Government of Montenegro.

As a follow-up to Rio, UNECE, jointly with FAO have been developing the Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy. The Action Plan will assist the countries of the region, with due respect to national ownership and national priorities, to accelerate their transition towards a green economy and achieve sustainable development. The Action Plan will set objectives, identify actions, key actors and a time framework. It will build on existing initiatives and rest on the following 5 main

pillars:

1. Sustainable production and consumption of forest products
2. The low carbon forest sector
3. Decent green jobs in the forest sector
4. Valuation and payment of ecosystem services
5. Monitoring and governance of the forest sector in the green economy

The UNECE Inland Transport Committee (ITC) has de facto become the UN center for inland transport. UNECE manages 57, including 16 global, inland (road, rail, inland water and intermodal) transport conventions and is uniquely placed to contribute to sustainable transport. The UNECE vehicle regulations have contributed to the 15 % reduction of carbon-monoxide emission of heavy duty vehicles in 2008 from the baseline of 1988. Vehicle Regulation No. 49 imposed by UNECE for heavy duty vehicles can reduce emission of particulates by 20 times from 1992 to 2014. UNECE vehicle regulations have also accelerated the introduction of vehicles with alternative fuels, electric vehicles, as well as environmentally friendly fuel “standards”. Furthermore, the UNECE-led project funded from the UN Development Account will provide countries with a practical tool for measuring their CO₂ generation from their economic activities and design tailored policy interventions.

Economic benefits of mobility can be partly offset by human suffering and economic costs of over one million road users dead and over 50 million injured every year. The Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) implemented jointly by UNECE and WHO-Europe contributes to sustainable mobility and more efficient transport system; job creation through investment in environment and health; reduction of transport-related greenhouse gases, air pollutants and noise; and promotes healthy and safe modes of transport. Currently, UNECE and WHO have been jointly developing a Manual for the National Transport, Health and Environment Action Plans (NTHEAPs) which will provide national authorities with guidance on integrating transport, environment and health into joint action plans. The draft Manual will be presented to THE PEP Steering Committee in November 2012 to explore capacity-building for NTHEAPs in UNECE member states.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

In my short intervention I provided just a few examples of the UNECE work. Key to all these activities are a) synergies between analytical, normative and operational work, b) interconnections between economic, social and environmental dimensions, c) linkages between national, regional and global levels, and d) cooperation and partnerships with all relevant stakeholders.

Thank you