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**Statement by Mr. Sven Alkalaj
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe**

at

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Rio de Janeiro, 19 June 2012

“SHARING ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION IN ACTION”

**Effective Access to Reliable Environmental Information
How can UNECE Contribute**

Your Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Effective access to information is an important step in our pursuit for greater environmental democracy. Not only does it ensure the transparency of the process of environmental decision-making, it supports public participation and access to justice on environmental matters. Ultimately, access to information is a precondition for making informed decisions and for holding Governments and public authorities accountable.
- UNECE and its multilateral environmental agreements contribute to:

- Establishing the legal requirements for access to environmental information;
 - Setting up national and regional environmental information systems;
 - Improving national capacities in the field of monitoring, collection, storage, assessment and reporting of environmental data; and
 - Developing and producing internationally agreed environmental indicators and indicator-based assessments.
- Two UNECE treaties, both open to global accession, provide a legal framework that promotes public access to information on environmental matters: the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). By recognizing every person's right to access information irrespective of citizenship or nationality, these two multilateral environmental agreements transform Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration into a legally binding commitment.
 - Access to environmental information raises the awareness of the general public. It allows the public to review compliance with environmental provisions; to identify potential environmental and health risks; to monitor progress in reducing pollution and in mitigating the effects of existing releases; and to build a sustainable society. Furthermore, the Protocol on PRTRs has a great potential to become a tool for measuring the success of green economy.
 - The Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, for which UNECE also ensures Secretariat function, grant the public the legal right to receive early and effective information on any project, plan or programme that may adversely impact people's health or environment from across borders. It also allows them to influence the related decision-making. These two treaties provide for extensive consultations and the informed participation of all relevant authorities and stakeholders in the environmental assessment process.
 - Under the Helsinki Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, a monitoring mechanism provides for biennial reporting by Parties on their implementation of the Convention's requirements for the prevention of, preparedness for and response to major industrial accidents.

- With regard to air pollution, the Parties to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its eight protocols have established a comprehensive system of monitoring, data collection and reporting on a wide range of air pollutants that are hazardous to human health and the environment. Monitoring activities have been carried out since the late 1970s and represent the longest available time-series of environmental information.
- For water, the status and pressures on transboundary waters are regularly assessed under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The Water Convention also provides guidance on good practice in joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, which helps countries to improve their knowledge base and their water management. Future assessment work is proposed to focus on the interlinkages and trade-offs between water, energy and agriculture. The approaching opening of the Water Convention to countries from outside the UNECE region in 2012 or in early 2013 will expand the geographical scope of the work, as well as increase the exchange of experience with other regions of the world.
- The Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention obliges the Parties to set measurable targets in the areas of water supply and sanitation, water management and health protection. The Meeting of the Parties to be held next year will undertake the first review of progress made in setting and achieving these targets.
- Environment Ministers of the UNECE region, at their Seventh “Environment for Europe” Conference held in Astana, Kazakhstan, last year, agreed to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) throughout the region and to establish a process of regular environmental assessments at both the national and regional levels. SEIS can support the assessment work under the multilateral environmental agreements, as it is flexible and can respond to evolving situations.
- UNECE is working closely with the European Environment Agency, the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements and relevant international institutions to build the capacities of countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Russian Federation in

environmental monitoring, production of harmonized indicators and publication of assessments.

- The UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment has prepared guidelines and recommendations to Governments of these countries to make air and water monitoring an effective policy tool, and to help them publish regular, indicator-based state-of-the-environment reports.
- The Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators is helping national statistical agencies and environment ministries in these countries to improve environmental statistics, strengthen environmental reporting and promote comparability of environmental statistics and indicators in the region.
- The UNECE Programme of Environmental Performance Reviews helps assessing progress made by individual countries in environmental monitoring, data management and public access to environmental information.

This was in a nutshell what UNECE does on environmental monitoring and assessment and how our work is linked to Principle 10.

We stand ready to share our experiences with countries outside the UNECE region to help developing SEIS as a regular process of assessments worldwide.

We are looking forward to further cooperation with the European Environment Agency and with other partners and stakeholders, to promote effective access to reliable environmental information in the pan-European region and worldwide.

Thank you for your attention.