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Opening Statement

on behalf of

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

delivered by

**Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe**

Central Asian Priorities in the post-2015 Development Agenda

at

**High-level Segment of the SPECA Economic Forum, Second session
Almaty, 21 November 2013**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The post-2015 development agenda will define the priorities of the international community and the United Nations system for the next decades. In his report to the General Assembly of July 2013, the UN Secretary-General emphasizes that a new post-2015 era demands a new vision and a responsive framework that can bring together the full range of human aspirations and needs to ensure a life of dignity for all.

The member States of the UN took an important step this September towards a universal agenda that applies to all countries and all people. This call for a universal agenda resonates in our region, where all countries face challenges reaching the socially excluded and propelling economic growth without irreversible negative impact on the environment.

At the national level, several Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) have participated in consultations, conducted through the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) on national priorities for the post-2015 development agenda. Today, we will have an opportunity to discuss priorities for the Central Asian region.

At the regional level, the UN system in the region, under the joint leadership of UNECE and the UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia, have formulated a regional post-2015 vision entitled “Building more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous societies in Europe and Central Asia”. The publication, a copy of which you have received,

may serve as a reference for discussions at this meeting and beyond.

Agreeing on regional priorities for Central Asia's post-2015 development agenda is important. Regardless of the outcome of global post-2015 discussions; here, within the SPECA region, policy makers could use the priorities from a "regional agenda" for their own decision-making purposes.

Added benefits will also come to SPECA countries, if their priorities can be reflected in the global post-2015 development agenda. This would ensure appropriate attention by the UN and the donor community to these priorities and would help attract resources for properly addressing them. While each Central Asian country has its specific needs linked to national income and other factors, ongoing consultations have also highlighted several shared priorities. In the MY WORLD Survey - a good education, better healthcare, and an honest and responsive government - were people's top priorities in Europe and Central Asia for the post-2015 agenda. They also raised other issues that can only be achieved through coordinated regional action. Among such priorities are: the protection of rivers and forests; access to clean water and sanitation; and action taken on climate change.

As already mentioned several times today, the ecosystems of the Aral Sea basin are closely connected, among others by the two main river basins of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya. Only through regional cooperation can SPECA countries guarantee environmental sustainability, efficient and rational management of their shared water resources and effective action on climate change. Increasing strain on the water

resources of the region could also hinder the achievement of two more potential goals, identified during recent consultations: access to affordable and nutritious food and reliable energy, as was so dramatically demonstrated by the compound water-energy-and-food crisis of 2007-2008. Therefore, more effective support to regional cooperation on environmental protection and integrated water resources management could be a legitimate demand from the countries of the region within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

One of the shortcomings of the existing MDGs framework is the lack of guidance as to the means to achieve the MDGs. Therefore, the question of “means”, that is to say “resources,” for accomplishing the region’s post-2015 goals is another area where regional cooperation could make an important contribution.

There is no doubt that development assistance to less affluent SPECA countries will remain an important tool to support their efforts to successfully meet the new post-2015 development targets. At the same time, there are several Central Asian countries that have reached or are close to reaching the status of either developed or middle-income nations. These countries have significant domestic resources that could help them to rapidly progress towards the new development goals with little external assistance.

The increasing wealth of energy exporting countries also allows them to support development and social stability in neighbouring countries through investment, market access and other forms of economic cooperation and assistance. Of course, regional cooperation is a win-win exercise: everyone

profits from it.

There are many ways SPECA countries could support each other in their effort to achieve the goals in the post-2015 development agenda. Improving regional trade relations, transport, border crossing, and intra-regional investment could support the identification of the means for development that were mentioned in the Report to the Secretary-General.

Strengthened regional cooperation could facilitate the achievement of the post-2015 development agenda in yet another way. “The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda” underlines the importance of peace and prevention of conflicts for the development and well-being of societies. By strengthening regional cooperation, SPECA countries invest in the security and stability of the entire region – an important pre-condition for stable and sustainable development in Central Asia.

Ensuring that the role of regional cooperation is fully recognized within the post-2015 development agenda would considerably increase the chances of all SPECA countries being able to successfully achieve the new goals by 2030. Including regional cooperation among the tools facilitating the achievement of development goals would strengthen the practical focus of the post-2015 development agenda; it would strengthen the important role that SPECA can play in regional cooperation; and it would increase the chances that we can deliver on our ambitions.

I would like to invite you to discuss together the potential role of regional cooperation in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, including strengthened joint work within the SPECA framework.
