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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 inauguration of the Joint UNECE-ESCAP SPECA Regional Office

Almaty, 22 November 2013

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to inaugurate, jointly with my colleague from ESCAP, Deputy Executive Secretary Shun-ichi Murata, the Joint UNECE-ESCAP SPECA Regional Office in Almaty. I would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for the generous support it has provided to the establishment of the Office. The centrally located historic building that houses the Office provides excellent working conditions for the joint UNECE-ESCAP staff. It is a beautiful symbol of the commitment by Kazakhstan to supporting regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Since its establishment, the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia has enjoyed support from all stakeholders. Governments, the private sector, the academic community and civil society alike recognize the importance of regional cooperation. As one result, for a number of years, demands for more active and effective work within the SPECA framework have been consistently heard at Governing Council meetings. I heard the same message during my visits to the capitals of SPECA countries. I was told again and again by presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers that the Programme was judged not by statements but by its capacity to implement well-targeted, practical, substantive projects in support of regional cooperation.

Meetings of the six Project Working Groups – on Water, Energy and Environment, Trade, Transport and Border-Crossing, Statistics, Knowledge-Based Development and

Gender and Economy – have been constantly calling for more resources to meet their regional objectives and the growing expectations of participating countries.

The establishment of the Joint UNECE-ESCAP SPECA Regional Office in Almaty is a major step towards improved project implementation capacity in the framework of the Programme. Prior to the opening of this Office, UNECE and ESCAP were “non-resident agencies” in Central Asia. This has limited our ability to assess the needs of participating countries; liaise with governments, business, academia and civil society; design and implement projects; and strengthen cooperation with partner organizations and donors who are broadly represented here in Almaty. The opening of the Office has profoundly changed this situation. Having UNECE and ESCAP staff working together as one team allows the two Regional Commissions to more effectively deploy the expertise that is available at their Headquarters in support of field activities – be this in capacity building, policy seminars or other forms of technical assistance. The Office, with the able Mr. Nikolay Pomoschnikov as its Head, is already providing active support to programme implementation, including, among others, the organization of this week’s impressive agenda of SPECA events.

I would like to raise my glass to the host country, Kazakhstan, that has provided such excellent conditions for the Office, as well as to the Head of the Office, its staff and all others who worked so hard to establish an outpost for UNECE and ESCAP in the busy and beautiful regional cooperation hub that is Almaty.
