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Statement

by

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Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission
for Europe**

at

**the High-level international Conference on the “Role of Transport and
Transit Corridors in Ensuring International Cooperation, Stability
and Sustainable Development”**

Ashgabat, 3-4 September 2014

Your Excellency Mr. President Berdimuhamedov,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me, on behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to welcome you to the High-level International Conference on the Role of Transport and Transit Corridors in Ensuring International Cooperation, Stability and Sustainable Development.

I would like to express the gratitude of UNECE to the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting this important event, as well as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the International Road Transport Union for their contribution to and support for this event.

I would also like to thank you all for your participation.

Before going further, allow me to tell you a personal story. I have visited Afghanistan several times and I really like the pomegranates from the Kandahar area. Before my appointment to ECE, I even considered importing Afghan pomegranates to Denmark. If you hypothetically wanted to drive a truckload of these fruits from Kandahar to Copenhagen, you would need to travel a distance of 6,413 kilometres and cross eight national borders. This could in principle be done in about three days. But I am sure it would take longer. Why? Because the truck would meet a number of obstacles, go through cumbersome border procedures and perhaps meet an accident blocking the road. It would take too long a time. This illustrates why today's conference is so important. We are here to discuss transport corridors, multi-modal transport, border crossings, road safety and international cooperation.

Moving on to those issues I just mentioned, a **corridor**, as a collection of routes constructed from the transport networks of adjoining countries, is complex because it is usually multi-modal and includes multiple border

crossings. At the core of the corridor approach is the objective of facilitating not only trade and transport but also regional integration, stability and cooperation. It requires joint efforts of different government agencies, business representatives and, notably, transport operators, public and private alike.

Following on from this basic starting point, facilitating trade and transport across borders is of course key to economic development, which in turn is inevitably linked to sustainability; and sustainable development is approached by UNECE as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – thus it must be people-centered. As such, we are consistently and systematically directing our work towards integrated approaches to policy-making and setting of international norms, with a view to providing affordable, efficient and safe transport, increasing energy efficiency, and reducing pollution and congestion effects.

Among our efforts, the **Euro-Asian Transport Links**

project, also referred to as the EATL project, holds a prominent position. This project, now in its phase III, aims at making overland links between Europe and Asia operational. It has already identified main Euro-Asian road and rail routes that need to be developed as a priority. Cooperation among countries in transport infrastructure development is a prerequisite. Under this project, participating governments coordinate their investment plans; consider different forms of financing by learning about good and bad experiences of their peers; and work together to facilitate the removal of physical and administrative bottlenecks at border crossings and along the corridors. When completed, the EATL routes will not only provide more transport options for trade, but they will also prove to be essential for the socio-economic development of countries in the region and for their integration into the global economy. This is especially important for the landlocked developing countries. I therefore invite you all to pay special attention to this project during your discussions at the conference.

Strong and modern border management is vital for national and regional stability and economic growth. Good management of borders helps to reduce illegal trafficking of drugs, militants, weapons and radioactive materials across borders, while at the same time facilitating trade and legal movement of people. The challenge of ensuring the right balance in having open but at the same time secured and controlled borders is addressed by UNECE through international legal instruments such as the 1982 Harmonization Convention, the 1975 TIR Convention, among others. There is also a colossal ongoing effort to develop a **unified railway regulatory framework** to facilitate and expedite rail border crossings between regions and to improve the competitiveness of international rail freight services. The success of these efforts depends on all competent authorities working together in an effective and efficient manner, with cooperation and coordination taking place at different levels, namely intra-service, inter-agency and international.

Against this background I call on all participants to

actively participate in the discussions on border-crossing facilitation, to share their experiences and best practices, as well as to raise questions on how to further improve and integrate border management.

Transport cannot be **sustainable** unless it includes the element of **safety**, an issue which also needs to be considered at this meeting, and very importantly so. Globally, well over a million people are killed annually in road traffic accidents causing, in addition to human loss and suffering, billions of dollars of associated costs which, in some countries, amount to 1-3 % of their GDP. It follows that due attention has to be paid to road safety policies, incorporating not only passenger transport but also freight transport and the transport of dangerous goods. UNECE's extensive work in this field shows that road safety predominantly depends on driver behaviour, infrastructure quality and vehicle safety, and improvements can be achieved only by considering all these contributing factors. Naturally this assumes that the management of road safety is well organized, properly funded and deeply rooted in internationally sound legal

foundations such as the UN road safety conventions. Taking into account that we are almost half way through the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety, now is the time to speed up efforts to address road safety with an integrated approach, looking at infrastructure, vehicles, drivers, and new technologies together.

Speaking about the special needs of countries in **Central Asia** and particularly those participating in the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), the Working Group on Transport and Border-crossing Facilitation, jointly serviced by ECE and ESCAP, deserves appreciation for their dedicated attention to knowledge sharing in all important areas which will be addressed in our conference. Thus we can be assured that messages of the current conference will be followed up at expert level. At the same time I highly appreciate that Turkmenistan will be hosting the next SPECA Economic Forum and Governing Council Meeting in December and we can be confident that key messages from this Conference will be followed up at the political level also.

I would like to thank you all once more for being here today. I look forward to the fruitful discussions and constructive outcomes of this Conference. I wish you all great success in this event.

And, to return to my story, I hope that one day Afghan pomegranates will reach Denmark.

I now pass the floor to the distinguished Chair.

Thank you for your attention.
