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Statement

by

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at

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Panel: “Global Impact of the economic growth during the pandemic -sustainability”

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Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the Webit Foundation for the organization of this panel and the opportunity to address you today.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic growth is evident to all of us. Millions around the world have fallen into poverty. GDPs have contracted. Trade has decreased. Governments have instituted recovery plans to kickstart economic growth. Unfortunately, too often these are short-sighted and do not consider anything beyond the immediate future. We need a change.

The UN Secretary-General has identified recovery from COVID as an opportunity to create more sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. We don't have to go back to our old habits. By aligning rebuilding efforts with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we can "build back better".

And of course, perhaps the biggest challenge in achieving the 2030 Agenda is that of climate change. We are far, far from meeting the targets of the Paris Agreement. We have witnessed extraordinary weather events this year. Signs point to much worse to come.

Major obstacles to serious action on climate are the economic and social consequences of a green transition for communities dependent on the existing fossil-based system for their welfare. The UNECE region covers North America, all of Europe, Turkey, Israel and the countries of the former Soviet Union. In 2015, the share of fossil energy in the UNECE region was 80%. As of 2020 it was 82% of a bigger energy pie. Many countries in the region simply do not have the finances or the technological capacity to undertake a significant reformulation of their energy mix at this stage.

So we need a two-pronged approach: One, we need to mobilize greater amounts of financing to enable climate action, and two, we need to use all the means at our disposal to address the current situation, including in countries where fossil fuels are still a major share of the energy mix.

I'm happy to say that UNECE can help in both of these contexts.

UNECE, as a multilateral platform, facilitates economic integration and cooperation among its member States, via

- policy dialogue,
- development of regulations, norms and legal instruments,
- exchange of best practices, and
- technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition.

A significant advantage is that our multilateral platform allows us to address two significant dimensions of climate change: the transboundary aspect, and the cross-sectoral aspect.

Transboundary action is absolutely necessary, because neither pollution nor the effects of climate change stop at national borders. Countries must coordinate.

Meanwhile, actions taken in one sector can affect others. The transport sector affects the environment due to GHG emissions from vehicles, and the water sector affects the food system, as the availability of freshwater is critical to agriculture.

UNECE's climate change mitigation work therefore targets cross-cutting, transboundary areas to reduce emissions reductions. For example:

- i. International cooperation and national commitments under UNECE's Air Convention have helped to significantly cut air pollutants in 51 countries across Europe and North America.
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- ii. We promote significant reductions in GHG emissions from transport through more stringent UN Regulations on vehicle emissions, and facilitating the availability of greener fuel sources.
- iii. Buildings represent 40% of combustion-related CO₂ emissions in developed countries. UNECE's Framework Guidelines for the energy performance of buildings help lower this amount. Local authorities, trade associations and academic institutions are but some of the stakeholders we have partnered with, to help disseminate and implement these Guidelines. Everybody has a role to play.
- iv. UNECE has identified methane management as a critical part of addressing climate change. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, therefore there is a large potential for GHG emissions this way, and cost-effective mitigation technologies are readily available. Our Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Management in the Oil and Gas Sector is a popular tool that helps countries reduce the carbon footprint of their fossil fuel use.
- v. We also work on blockchain-based methods to promote greater sustainability in garment and footwear value chains and also to reduce food loss and waste.

These are but a few examples from our normative work. I hope it gives you an idea of how the UN can support countries' efforts towards a green transition with standards, recommendations and best practices.

I mentioned climate finance as a second prong. As discussed at COP26, billions of dollars are needed to finance the required investments in sustainable infrastructure. Governments alone cannot raise this money. We absolutely need the private sector.

Here also, UNECE is a big proponent of using standards, norms and legal instruments to create suitable conditions for investment. We partner with International Financial Institutions to integrate the principles of Public Participation and Environmental Impact Assessments in their climate-related investment projects in the region. Our Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), as well as the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), set out obligations to assess the environmental impact of certain activities early in the planning process. These norms are routinely used by multilateral development banks in the UNECE region when considering their investment projects.

Another normative tool is UNECE's Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The Water Convention provides a global framework for cooperation between countries on climate change adaptation in shared basins, including sharing knowledge and supporting basins in accessing finance for climate change adaptation.

UNECE also supports its member States in identifying information needs and measurement challenges related to climate finance. Green finance products must have mechanisms in place that assist in the selection of projects but, even more importantly, in the collection and verification of related performance information. Here, environmental statistics and other indicators that may be collected as part of other reporting obligations are key. Our 2021 Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Climate Change-Related Statistics discussed these information needs and measurement challenges, and the role of National Statistics Offices in addressing them.

I hope I have been able to give you some food for thought regarding

the importance of norms, standards and legal instruments to accelerate action and mobilize climate finance, as well as the necessity of transboundary and cross-sectoral measures and regional cooperation. I thank you once again for the opportunity to speak here today.
