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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**  
(Special session, Geneva, 18-19 February 2003)

Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials  
"Environment for Europe"  
(Fifth session, Geneva, 19-21 February 2003)  
(Item 5 of the joint provisional agenda)

**DRAFT STATEMENT ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BY  
THE UNECE MINISTERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT<sup>1</sup>**

Preamble

We, Ministers of the Environment from the UNECE region,

1. Convinced that cooperation on education for sustainable development can contribute to mutual understanding, strengthen trust between nations and respect for cultural values, develop friendly relations and tolerance between nations, and contribute to peace and security,
2. Emphasizing that education, apart from being a human right, is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and an essential tool for good governance,
3. Recognizing that environmental education, as it has evolved over many years in the various countries of our region, has increasingly addressed the entire range of global issues included in Agenda 21<sup>2</sup> and all major United Nations conferences, and thus represents a core component of education for sustainable development,

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<sup>1</sup> This document was prepared by the drafting group on environment and education of the Working Group of Senior Officials in cooperation with the ECE secretariat. The drafting group was established by decision of the Working Group of Senior Officials "Environment for Europe" at its third session.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Agenda 21-Global Programme of Action on Sustainable Development, 1992.

4. Noting that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002) recommended the United Nations General Assembly to announce a decade of education for sustainable development, starting in 2005, and that the outcome of the Summit substantiates the need to integrate sustainable development into education systems at all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and non-formal education, in order to promote education as a key agent for change,

5. Convinced that education for sustainable development is a fundamental tool for improving patterns of consumption and production, laying the ground for research and development of technologies that may improve the environment, as well as for enabling people to integrate environmental issues into their perceptions and actions, starting at a young age,

6. Stressing that education improves the capability of citizens as well as their motivation to assess information and participate in decision-making and to take actions consistent with the UNECE Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters,

7. Taking into account the goals identified in the Millennium Declaration<sup>3</sup> and in Education For All: Meeting our Collective Commitments.<sup>4</sup>

8. Stressing that the UNECE Regional Ministerial Meeting preparing for the World Summit had called for initiatives in education while agreeing to “improve education systems and the design of learning programmes on sustainable development to increase general understanding of how to implement and promote sustainable development in practice,”

9. Taking into account international agreements from the Belgrade Charter<sup>5</sup> and Tbilisi declaration<sup>6</sup> to more recent developments such as Agenda 21, Baltic 21E<sup>7</sup>, the Thessaloniki Declaration<sup>8</sup> and the Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the EU,<sup>9</sup>

10. Acknowledging that education for sustainable development should consider diverse local, regional and national circumstances and, therefore, encouraging broad cooperation at the international, regional and State levels involving all stakeholders including the public authorities, the educational community, non-governmental organizations, business, youth and the media,

11. Understanding the need to disseminate and promote good practices in education for sustainable development as well as to promote networking in this field,

12. Recognizing the importance of the following key principles:

- Education for sustainable development is a cross-sectoral issue, encompassing economic, environmental and social dimensions, and demanding a participatory and holistic approach;

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, the Dakar Framework for Action, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Belgrade Charter, UNESCO-UNEP, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Tbilisi Declaration, UNESCO-UNEP, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> An Agenda 21 for Education for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region.

<sup>8</sup> Thessaloniki Declaration, UNESCO, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> The Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Union, 2001-2010.

- Learners at all levels should be encouraged to use critical thinking and reflection as a prerequisite for concrete action for sustainable development;
- Sustainable development should be addressed by all educational programmes at all levels, including vocational education and continuing education;
- Education is a lifelong process involving formal, non-formal and informal education;
- The overall aim of education for sustainable development is to empower citizens to act for positive environmental change and this implies a process-oriented, participatory and action-oriented approach,

13. Encouraged by the interest shown both by Governments and by non-governmental organizations during the preparations for the Kiev Conference in strengthening environmental education as a core strand of education for sustainable development,

14. Stressing the need to reorient environmental education, together with other fields of education, towards sustainable development,

15. Considering our role in the promotion of education for sustainable development,

#### *Decisions*

16. Recognize the attached basic elements for a UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development as timely and important;

17. Call upon our Governments to take part in further work on finalizing the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development and to initiate and foster State processes and establish State focal points and to report on State progress to UNECE;

18. Invite bodies responsible for education in UNECE member States to use the attached basic elements in preparing relevant legislation and decisions on the local, State and regional levels;

19. Emphasize that education for sustainable development is an investment in our future, and that each country should ensure that appropriate resources are made available for its development; for this purpose Governments may wish to develop economic instruments. We understand that many countries, particularly countries in transition, may need donor support to carry out the activities;

20. Recognizing the important role of the regional commissions as laid out in the Johannesburg Summit's Plan of Implementation, invite UNECE to:

- Take the lead and initiate a joint process for education for sustainable development on the regional level and start a dialogue with all relevant international actors, including NGOs and major groups, and to set up a task force for this purpose;
- Urge the task force to finalize the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development as a follow-up to this ministerial statement and monitor its future implementation;

- Closely monitor the progress and facilitate the implementation and follow-up of this ministerial statement,

21. Note the crucial role of UNECE in facilitating this work and invite bilateral and multilateral donors to support the process.