

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Opening Statement

by

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at

**Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Deputy Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General, heads of regional UN system entities, Resident Coordinators,

Colleagues and friends,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all of you who, maybe not for the first time, are participating in the Regional Forum. Thanks to you, this is an event that is going from strength to strength and has become the reference platform for sustainable development in our region.

This Forum reflects very well the vocation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to be a connector - bringing together not only governments from the entire region but also other stakeholders, including a vibrant representation of civil society, business and academia. Our convening power allows us to draw in this varied constituency, which represents also different sectoral interests.

But we could not – and we did not want to - organise the Forum by ourselves. Once more, the Regional Forum is the expression of the strong collaboration among UN entities in our region. I express my gratitude to all UN partners who, together with UNECE, have made the Regional Forum possible.

This spirit of collaboration is not limited to the Forum.

There are numerous instances of what we can deliver when we work together. To mention just an example, we organized last year, together with UNFPA, the Regional Conference on ICPD+25 called “Enabling Choices: Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development”. It was a great success that showed how the implementation of the ICPD Plan of Action can make a valuable contribution to advance the 2030 Agenda.

For the first time, this Regional Forum also benefits from the presence of all Resident Coordinators based in the 17 programme countries of our region, thus connecting the regional level discussions with the UN's work at the country level. I hope that this will become a good practice, allowing for fruitful exchange and contributing to a successful implementation of the reform of the UN development system.

I am convinced that the personal and institutional links that we will forge and renew here will open new possibilities for cooperation.

It cannot be stressed enough: Cooperation remains the key to unlock new solutions to problems that we cannot resolve on our own. This is particularly true at the regional level, where countries share many challenges and the rewards from concerted action are more apparent. Many aspects of the 2030 Agenda have a transboundary dimension that is better addressed through regional cooperation. A paramount example is international water cooperation, where the UNECE Water Convention is playing a crucial role with a growing influence. In 2018, two African countries, Chad and Senegal, joined the Convention and multiple expressions of interest have been received beyond the pan-European region.

Promoting this regional cooperation to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the core mandate of UNECE.

We fulfil this mandate in many ways. UNECE's normative work, in particular, contributes to translating global goals into concrete commitments and guidelines for action in environment, transport, energy, trade and other areas. It provides a common language and the regulatory backbone for key activities. And this common language is important not only for governments, but also the private sector and other stakeholders. An example is the UN Framework Classification for Sustainable Resources Management, which is being increasingly accepted as a global standard that can help ensure sound management of all resources.

Our normative work has a practical orientation, seeking to address concrete problems and propose solutions that have been distilled based on shared experiences. There is a strong link between this work and our capacity-building and policy advisory activities. These contribute to bridging development and regulatory gaps across this diverse region and thus advance regional integration. We work closely with UN Country Teams and have participated in the 17 UNDAFs in our region. We look forward to strengthening our cooperation to enhance the contribution of our tools and expertise to meet country needs.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a new paradigm for public policies. Actions cannot be considered in isolation. There is increasing demand for integrated policy advice, which considers both the multiple dimensions of sustainable development and cross-sectoral impacts. UNECE, with a varied portfolio of sectoral activities, is well placed to meet this demand.

We are adapting our working methods to leverage this diverse expertise through a nexus approach. Such an approach cuts across internal boundaries to address key challenges by integrating different tools and perspectives. Ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, promoting smart cities and encouraging new form of sustainable mobility and smart connectivity are critical tasks for policymakers. Measuring and monitoring SDG implementation is essential, so we know that we are moving in the right direction. These are the four “nexus” areas in which UNECE aims to focus for maximum impact.

We are aware that change will not happen if the necessary resources are not forthcoming. And that not only governments but other actors need to contribute the necessary funding. The UN Road Safety Trust Fund, with a secretariat hosted by UNECE, is a good example of how collaboration can mobilise the necessary finance. In eight months, almost \$20 million have been raised.

The SDGs under consideration this year are an eloquent expression of the policy relevance and forward-looking orientation of the 2030 Agenda. They cover issues that are central to current political debates: education, sustainable growth and employment, inequality, climate change and the role of institutions.

UNECE has contributions to make in all these areas.

- Our work on ageing emphasises the importance of lifelong learning.
- The UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development enhances capacity and increases awareness on this important topic.
- We are developing standards and providing policy advice, in particular through our programme of Environmental Performance Reviews, that help countries to decouple economic growth from environmental pressures and reduce waste.
- Our work on water, housing and energy addresses inequalities of access, which compound other sources of inequality.
- We are assisting countries in reducing their carbon footprint and also addressing the needs for adaptation, in particular in the transport sector.
- Our activities under the Aarhus Convention, which has served as inspiration elsewhere, facilitate people's participation in decision-making and access to justice on environmental matters.

I am convinced that these contributions, which are not exhaustive, will offer useful insights and practical tools during our discussions.

Let me wish you a productive and enjoyable Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

Thank you.

