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**Statement**

**by**

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**at the**

**UN/CEFACT conference “Traceability for Sustainable Textile and Leather Value  
Chains”**

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**Palais des Nations, Salle XXIII**

Good morning UN/CEFACT Experts,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this UN/CEFACT Conference on Traceability for Sustainable Value Chains in the Textile and Leather sector.

The Conference supports the implementation of the **UN/CEFACT Framework Initiative on Traceability for Sustainable Trade**, with a specific application to Textile Value Chains. This is carried out by UNECE in close collaboration with governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and international organizations.

*Why is there such interest in this area?*

The textile and leather industry is a complex one, with value chains stretching around the globe. This makes it difficult to obtain full and accurate information about where and how our clothes are produced. We know how much these items will cost us. But we are not aware of the real costs to society, the environment, and the people that made them.

In fact, the textile industry is currently one of the most polluting industries. It is one of the largest producers of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and waste every year, with a low rate of recycling. Not to mention the additional impacts of unsustainable water consumption and negative health effects: The Italian Textile and Health Association reports that about 8 per cent of skin diseases are caused by the chemicals used for dyeing the clothing and footwear we use. Within the current trajectories of production and consumption worldwide, these pressures will intensify by 2030 in each of these areas. These trends do not augur well for the

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transition to a circular and green economy, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, or the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the last years, good progress has been made, including through the implementation of initiatives such as the [ILO and IFC Better Work programme](#) and the [OECD Due Diligence Guidance in the garment and footwear sector](#). But more remains to be done on safety risks. Inspection and compliance must be enhanced to better safeguard working conditions for the more than 60 million workers in the industry, 75% of whom are women. This is a significant number. It has a tremendous impact on whether we will be able to achieve SDG 5 on gender equality.

To increase the industry's ability to manage its value chain more sustainably, both consumers and producers must first be aware of the nature and magnitude of these risks, and of their impacts. Improving transparency and traceability has therefore become a priority. This will be a powerful tool to help businesses to manage risk, including for their reputation, and for consumers to make informed and responsible choices.

In 2017, UNECE launched a study called [Textile 4 SDG 12](#), which discusses the need for transparency and traceability of value chains in the sector in relation to the environmental, social and human health impacts. It also provides recommendations on the way forward. The study builds on the successful work of UN/CEFACT on traceability for sustainable trade in the agri-food and fishery sectors. It also confirms the potential benefits associated with more transparent and traceable supply chains, and provides useful experiences and tools, which the textile and leather industries could draw upon.

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The aim of the UN/CEFACT Initiative is to:

- Set up a multi-stakeholder policy platform to engage with key actors for transparency and traceability for value chains and produce a UNECE policy recommendation;
- Analyze the business requirement specifications for the textile and leather sector for different types of fibers. And, based on this analysis, to develop a tracking and tracing standard for sustainability in this area with implementation guidelines;
- And, finally, the recommendation and standard will be piloted with interested member States and businesses to develop a programme for training and awareness on the recommendation and the standard.

These outputs should guide the sector towards more responsible production and consumption patterns, in line with SDG 12. The conference today aims at discussing possible approaches - in terms of supporting policies, regulations and standards - and innovative solutions, with representatives of key stakeholders for the sector.

As a follow-up, UNECE will partner with the International Trade Centre and the European Commission, for a Lab Debate on Transparency and Traceability at this year's European Union Development Days in June in Brussels.

Also, from another perspective of the industry and in line with our aim to support the SDGs, UNECE is cooperating with the FAO, the ILO, UN Environment, UNDP, the UNFCCC, UN DESA and the UN Partnership Office on "sustainable fashion". We are organizing several events during the High-Level

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Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July. A film, developed with UN Television and featuring UNDP Goodwill Ambassador, actress Ms. Michelle Yeoh, will be launched at the HLPF in New York. The film will focus on making the fashion industry more sustainable by highlighting its impact on the environment and the sustainability of forest-based fibres.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, under this UN/CEFACT initiative, UNECE wishes to engage with leaders, experts and innovators within the textile and leather industry to develop standards and recommendations in support of more responsible and informed consumption choices.

Thank you for your participation. I wish you a productive and fruitful discussion today.

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