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Statement

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

ITF Opening Plenary

Leipzig, 18 May 2016

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

2015 was indeed, as we heard from the ITF Secretary-General, a landmark year for sustainable development - with the historic and ambitious sustainable development goals. To achieve those goals we need greener, more efficient and inclusive transport systems. We are privileged and proud to have given – for almost 70 years - a strong contribution to this vision in our UNECE Inland Transport Committee.

I sometimes like to say that, although some of you may not know us, UNECE is the best-branded organization in the world. The reason for that is our World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations. This is a unique worldwide regulatory body where experts come together to develop vehicle standards, and these standards, are in every one of your cars. Notice the E in all windows in your vehicles, on the seat belt, child seat, emergency brakes, there are E numbers all over your vehicles. That “E” stands for “Economic Commission for Europe” or, as we say it today: E for Excellence. And these standards are very important, because applying them takes us right back to our mantra: They make vehicles greener, safer and more efficient.

The same is true for all the 58 UN transport conventions and agreements that we host. These 58 instruments provide the legal foundation for organizing traffic across the world and promoting connectivity. They cover a broad range of road safety issues such as road signs and signals, internationally harmonized traffic rules, vehicle inspections, the transport of dangerous or perishable goods, conditions for professional drivers and many, many more. They also facilitate the development of transport networks, whether they are by rail, road or rivers. One of the conventions is the TIR Convention – you have surely all seen the TIR logos on freight trucks. It is a key Convention that enormously reduces border-crossing times for trucks.

These UN transport conventions create a strong legal foundation for greener, safer and more inclusive transport. But the most important point I wish to make is that all these road safety instruments and agreements are not ours. They are yours: ready to take, ready to use. They are globally available – not only to countries in our region but countries worldwide. However, once you join you need to implement and enforce the agreements. Doing that takes political will and commitment. But UNECE is ready to support you at every step of the way, via both advisory services and capacity-building. We are committed to helping you achieve the transport-related targets under the Sustainable Development Goals.

New technology will help us. The integration of information and transport technology has the potential to totally transform our transport systems – intelligent transport systems, autonomous vehicles. This can facilitate access for all, reduce pollution and emissions, improve mobility, mitigate traffic congestions and ensure seamless transitions between roads,

rail, airlines, ships in the transport of people and goods. The UNECE Inland Transport Committee is at the forefront of the development of regulations for these Intelligent Transport Systems. The Vienna Convention was just modified to allow for autonomous driving. But we need strong, internationally-harmonized regulations to deploy them safely, and effectively allow the systems to work across borders. I encourage you all to send your experts to Geneva participate in this work and help us develop these standards and further develop the conventions.

Vehicle regulations and transport conventions are only part of our work on making transport greener, more efficient and more inclusive. We work on Road Safety – key to sustainable transport – and do so closely with the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt. We invite you to join us in creating a new Road Safety Fund to scale up our efforts to stop road crashes and save millions of lives. We work on climate change adaptation and have developed a tool called ForFITS which helps policymakers analyse the impact of transport policies on emissions. We host the Transport Environment and Health Pan-European Programme – THE PEP – which promotes greener, healthier urban mobility solutions, including something that is dear to the heart of all us Danes: cycling being one of most sustainable and healthy transport modes.

These are examples of what we do – and what we do together. If you wish to see more, I encourage you to read our recent publication, “Transport for Sustainable Development: The case of Inland Transport”, produced jointly with the other Regional Commissions, IRU and UIC. And I encourage you to work even closer with us to make transport systems **greener, more efficient and more inclusive**.

Thank you.
