

**Mid-Term Review (MTR) meeting  
European Environment and Health Process (EHP)  
Haifa, Israel, 28-30 April 2015**

**Statement by Mr Christian Friis Bach  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the High-Level Mid-term Review of the European Environment and Health Process. Together, we can make a difference to better protect our environment and health.

I would like to thank our Israeli hosts for their hospitality and all countries and partners for their contributions. I would also like to congratulate colleagues at WHO for the thorough preparation of the meeting.

I have – as many of you I am sure - been affected by cancer in my family and amongst my close friends. It is a terrible disease affecting all citizens, communities and countries. And when you look at the large differences in cancer rates between countries and communities, there is no doubt that a prime cause is pollution in our environment. It comes from the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the earth we touch, the way we live and move. Overall a highly disturbing 25 per cent of all deaths and diseases in the European Region can be linked to environmental factors.

Air pollution alone killed more than 7 million people worldwide in 2012. This makes it more deadly than malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS combined, and by far the world's largest single environmental health risk. The economic costs of health impacts in the WHO European Region are estimated to be USD 1.6 trillion.

We have enough evidence. We need solutions, actions.

Over the past twenty years, WHO/Europe and UNECE have been joining forces in protecting the environment and thereby improving human health. Examples of this cooperation are the Water Convention, the Protocol on Water and Health, the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution and its task force on Health, as well as the Joint Programme on Transport, Health and Environment, THE PEP. The cooperation has helped for instance to significantly improve air quality in the ECE region reducing emissions of a series of harmful substances by 40 to 70% since 1990 in

Europe. The air we breathe today in Europe and North America is much cleaner than it was 30 years ago.

But this is not enough. We must do more. On cleaning the air, the water, our food and promoting smart cities and transport systems encouraging also walking and cycling. We must do more to support the synergies expressed by the expected Sustainable Development Goals. And we must include health as a key component also when we review progress using mechanisms such as the Environmental Performance Reviews.

The European Environment and Health Process is vitally important as it is a unique example of linking environment and health sectors as equal partners. We are committed to do even more and do even better.

Thank you.