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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

World Habitat Day Press Conference

Garden of the Palais des Nations, 12:30, 7 October 2013

Your Excellences,

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

And partners in disaster preparedness and response,

Thank you for taking the time to come to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's exhibit on post-disaster housing. These houses showcase some of the latest developments in easy-to-build, affordable and effective housing for those displaced by natural or manmade disasters. One, donated by Estonia, is designed to be a dwelling. The other, donated by Canada, is a multi-functional unit which can serve as a hospital or school. I would like to sincerely thank the Governments of Canada and Estonia for providing these model homes, and for their support in preparing this exhibit and related meetings.

There can be no doubt about the need for housing of this type. Disasters with both human and natural causes can devastate a country's housing stock. To provide just a few recent examples: the 2010 earthquake in Haiti left 1.5 million homeless; the 2011 earthquake and tsunami displaced over 300,000 people in Japan; and, in Syria, seven million people, or one third of the population, have been displaced from their homes by the current conflict [Note: in Syria of this 7 million about 2.2 million are refugees that have left the country and the remaining 4.8 million are internally displaced persons].

The UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management works to improve

housing and land management throughout its region. Many of our country profile studies on housing and land management include research on housing and its disaster preparedness. For example, in Tajikistan, a country where three-fourths of the population lives in 8- to 9-magnitude earthquake zones, we cooperated with the Tajik Government to identify how city planning and building codes could be improved to better prepare for earthquakes. Our upcoming country profile on Moldova also will address the use of both building codes and city planning for earthquake preparedness.

We coordinate our work with a range of partners, for example, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Development Programme, UN-Habitat, and others. We also partnering with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to improve disaster prevention and recovery in a variety of fields, including housing.

I am very pleased to inform you that the United Nation Economic Commission for Europe is discussing with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction how we can best cooperate together so that the existing, relevant work within the UNECE can best support the efforts of the UNISDR and others to support implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience. In this context, we will work together to develop standards for disaster risk reduction and prevention, help prevent industrial accidents and improve resilience in the areas such as housing, water and land management.

These discussions will enable the integration of disaster risk reduction into the sustainable development agenda of the UNECE and thus contribute to the

global implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action for building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters, as well as to the development of a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

To improve housing and urban development, our two organizations intend to cooperate on capacity building initiatives to promote the development and implementation of construction standards as well as planning regulations which would help buildings and human settlements to withstand better natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and landslides in the region.

Disasters do not know international boundaries, and neither do our efforts to prevent them and mitigate their impact. This week, the UNECE, along with member States, other United Nations agencies, international organizations, and representatives from academia and the private sector are coming together to decide on policies and programmes to improve sustainable housing. As we continue with our Committee session today and Wednesday, and as we go forward with our Ministerial Meeting tomorrow, I hope that this exhibit will serve as a small reminder that the decisions we make will have a real impact on buildings, homes and the everyday lives of millions of people.

Together, we can make housing better and safer for all. Thank you for coming here today and for supporting our work.