

**THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL****REMARKS AT THE REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNECE REGION****Geneva, 21 March 2019**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today to kick start the first of the five UN regional sustainable development forums.

This year, I have made it a priority to be present in all of them.

First, because the regional forums are critical tools to maintain the ambition, review progress, exchange practices and we are on-track to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Second, because this year's forums are taking place at a key moment for our collective effort to implement the 2030 Agenda and accelerate efforts to address climate change.

Not only will these regional forums pave the way for the ECOSOC High Level Political Forum, they will also set the scene for the major sustainable development meetings taking place in New York in September.

The first General Assembly SDG Summit since the 2030 Agenda's will be a defining moment.

Yes, it will be an opportunity to recognize the remarkable range of actions we have witnessed these past four years.

But it will also provide a clear picture of where we stand on this journey of transformation -- including where we are falling behind.

And the current forecast clearly shows we are off track. Collective, we need to pick up the pace.

And the Summit is our chance to generate more ambition and accelerate our work.

This is also why the Secretary-General will be convening a Climate Action Summit this year.

He is calling on all leaders to come to New York in September with concrete, realistic plans to enhance their nationally determined contributions by 2020, in line with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over the next decade, and to net zero by 2050.

The SDG and Climate Summits will be complemented by high-level meetings on Financing Sustainable Development, Universal Health Coverage and Small Island Developing States.

Across these meetings, there is one common message: time for action is now!

Excellencies,

In this context, today's Sustainable Development Forum takes on an added importance.

Members of the European Regional Economic Commission played a central role in shaping the 2030 Agenda. With 48 ECE members conducting Voluntary National Reviews during this first cycle, the region is clearly working hard to deliver.

Yet despite notable gains, this region – as all the others - still has a way to go.

A significant rural-urban divide exists in access to quality education, affecting the potential of younger generations to fully contribute to the 4th industrial revolution and digital economy.

The share of young people not working or studying remains elevated. Precarious forms of employment have become more prevalent.

Almost one quarter of the people in the European Union are estimated to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, while progress in closing gender gaps in labour participation has been limited.

Moreover, the transition to low-carbon, climate- resilient economies remains a major challenge.

Progress in decoupling economic expansion from environmental degradation remains insufficient.

Progress in reducing CO2 emissions has been slow, and emissions per capita remain much higher than global averages.

And the region's nationally determined contributions need to be ramped up to meet the Paris goals.

The question we must all address is this: how can we increase ambition and accelerate implementation?

Allow me to highlight three drivers.

First, we need to break down the silos that constrain policy action across sectoral lines.

The truth is: in all regions, the paradigm shift ushered in by the 2030 Agenda is not complete.

We have not yet fully transitioned from the Millennium Development Goals into the era of the SDGs.

For example, addressing climate change is not only about preventing catastrophic events; reducing fossil fuels use has also direct and immediate benefits on health.

Second, we need to match intentions with finance, public and private.

We are seeing encouraging progress in the region, as some countries are aligning budgetary processes with the SDGs.

There is also a growing private interest in SDG financing and a proliferation of sustainability and impact investments in the region.

But we are still far from the “trillions” that are required to achieve the SDGs everywhere, for everyone.

We need a public sector that sends strong, consistent and credible signals to the private sector on the direction of change and the business opportunities it will bring.

And, in some parts of the region, we need to increase financial market development to provide increased opportunities for more resilient, dynamic and inclusive economies.

Third, gender equality and women's empowerment.

Tackling gender inequality would reduce the impact of discriminatory social policies and help create decent jobs.

Facilitating the participation of women in the labour force would boost output and increase prosperity for all.

And let us recognize: the goal of achieving peaceful and inclusive societies cannot be achieved without tackling women's exclusion from political and social leadership.

Excellencies,

You can count on the United Nations to transform and better support your efforts.

Aligning our assets to help you deliver on the 2030 Agenda is the highest priority of the Secretary-General's reforms.

We now have a roadmap for change and clear and ambitious mandates by the UN General Assembly.

And are moving forward at full speed.

On 1 January, we have created – for the first time in the UN – an independent and empower system to coordinate all development activities of the UN.

Before January, Resident Coordinators were also Representatives of the UN Development Programme. But development coordination in the era of the SDGs is a full-time job.

And so is leading a large development agency such as UNDP.

This has now been addressed, and you can all expect to see more cohesive, effective and accountable UN Country Teams around the globe.

Country Teams that adapt more closely to the priorities and needs of each developing country.

And which can leverage more systematically on all assets scattered across the UN – including in our Regional Economic Commissions and specialized agencies.

As part of these reforms, we are also working in the review of all UN regional assets, aimed at establishing a new architecture adapted to trans- boundary priorities and realities.

The practice of collaboration among UN regional entities, linking policy discussions with operational realities, is well established in this region.

The Regional Forum should also involve all relevant actors in multisectoral policy discussions.

This should be nurtured further.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are well aware that reform is not a one-time event. It is a journey of transformation that will continue to unfold over the next 18 to 24 months.

But we are convinced that this is a once-in-a- generation opportunity to work differently and deliver better in all countries.

And there is a sense of urgency.

The clock is ticking on the 2030 Agenda and our reform will only be truly successful if it allows countries to accelerate scale up action the SDGs.

It is our collective responsibility to show greater urgency. That is clear from all our numbers and analysis.

And that was the call I heard from school children marching across Europe and the world last week.

They know about the costs of inaction for they will be the ones who will suffer them.

They can also see the benefits of environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and prosperous societies -- yet the power to make that happen is not in their hands. It is in ours. Therein lies our duty to them.

This September, world leaders in government, the private sector, civil society and international organizations have an opportunity to show that we have heard their call.

We must find the courage, the ingenuity and the means to raise the ambition of our action and move with far greater speed towards more peaceful, prosperous and inclusive societies on a healthy planet.

I encourage you to reflect over the next two days on how this region can contribute to this global effort.

Thank you.

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