



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA
(SPECA)

Eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council

Ganja, Azerbaijan, 23 November 2016

Ganja Declaration
of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum
“Strengthening Implementation of SDGs through Enhanced Cooperation”

We, the high-level representatives of the countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan (SPECA),

Having met in Ganja, on 22-23 November 2016, on the 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council and the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum,

Recalling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1) and the commitment of all stakeholders to implement it in collaboration,

Recalling the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014-2024 (A/RES/69/137), whose overarching goal is to overcome the structural challenges faced by LLDCs in order to achieve internationally agreed development goals,

Recalling the Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which was adopted by the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New Delhi on 3-5 November 2016,

Reaffirming the Baku Ministerial Declaration on “Ministerial Conference on the Aid-for-Trade Road Map for SPECA” held in Baku on 2 December 2010,

Reaffirming the Dushanbe Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” adopted in Dushanbe on 11 November 2015,

Welcoming the achievements of SPECA participating countries in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets, particularly in poverty reduction, education, maternal and infant health,

Noting further that the MDG gains were not distributed equitably among and within countries, and that the unfinished aspects of the MDG agenda need to be addressed in the new SDG framework,

Emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive approach in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that responds to the urgent economic, social and environmental challenges, based on a peaceful co-existence and the rule of law, with no one left behind,

Adopt the following Declaration:

1. We welcome the progress that SPECA participating countries have made in mainstreaming SDGs into their national development strategies and in establishing national coordination mechanisms for coherent implementation of SDGs at the national level.
2. We support a subregional consolidation of national assessments in SDG implementation as part of the SPECA programme of work, with SPECA serving as a bridge to the regional and global follow-up and review mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda. Notably, these subregional assessments should feed into ESCAP's and UNECE's Regional Fora for Sustainable Development, respectively.
3. We welcome convening of the 8th International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development scheduled from 11 to 14 June 2017 in Astana, including the holding of an energy ministerial meeting at its opening, which represents an opportunity for the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan to deepen their collaboration on energy issues through SPECA.
4. We welcome the positive impact of infrastructure development on the achievement of SDGs, noting in particular the recent launch of large energy infrastructure projects, and note further that with our landlocked status the development of: seamless cross-border transit transport; information and communications technology; and energy infrastructure, are crucial for supporting sustainable growth, improving social well-being and enhancing international cooperation and trade.
5. While reaffirming the great transport, trade and transit potential of the SPECA region, we emphasize the development of cooperation in the fields of border crossing and customs procedures, as well as, facilitation of transit procedures by using internationally recognised tools and best practises that will serve to enhance the trade in the region.
6. We support SPECA as a platform for reinforcing progress towards achieving SDGs on infrastructure, innovation, and diversification as crucial drivers of economic growth and sustainable development. Transboundary cooperation efforts under the SPECA framework aiming to achieve Goal 9, and targets 6.5, 7.1 and 7.2 are highly relevant and should guide further work on regional infrastructure connectivity in transport, energy and ICT (Goal9) as well as the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the SPECA subregion (Goals 6 and 7).
7. We note further with concern that SPECA countries are increasingly vulnerable to disasters and we welcome ESCAP's newly established Asia-Pacific Centre for Disaster Information Management (APDIM), hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran. We support its planned strategic direction as an information and knowledge hub on transboundary and multi-hazard disasters. We support its first planned initiative on sand and dust storms.
8. We welcome the organization of the EXPO-2017 on "Future Energy" in Astana which will be a catalyst for a new approach for the green economy in SPECA participating countries based on the principle of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the sake of our planet. We further support the establishment of the International Centre on development of

green technologies and investment with the support of the UN as a legacy of EXPO-2017. We reaffirm our full support for objectives to promote clean and sustainable energy.

9. We support the work of the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana in increasing effectiveness of the public service by building institutional and human capacity of the civil service of governments.

10. We support the UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference in Ashgabat on 26-27 November 2016 and call for SPECA countries to reinforce the Eurasian Transport Links programme to further develop trade and transport in the region, and in this regard, we pledge to fully support the third session of ESCAP's Ministerial Conference on Transport in Moscow on 5-9 December 2016.

11. We recognize the seriousness of the road safety situation in the subregion, and we urge SPECA participating countries to take all necessary actions to stop and reverse the current negative road safety trends and to implement road safety strategic goals based on the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, which will lead to achieving SDG target 3.6, and call for SPECA countries to accede to the UN Road Safety Conventions and legal agreements.

12. We reaffirm the importance of trade, finance, investment and technology in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support the High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific. In particular, we consider public-private partnerships as an important tool for the mobilization of necessary resources.

13. We note that despite recent improvements, non-physical barriers, delays and inefficiencies at border crossings and ports, including issues related to customs procedures and documentation requirements, uncertainty in logistical services and weak institutions, impose exceptionally high trade and transport transaction costs that continue to impose a burden on development.

14. We support the need of preparation of the regional research on technical and procedural barriers in trade.

15. While recognizing the real or potential role of remittances as a source of financing development, and the large share of gross domestic product they account for in the lower-income SPECA participating countries, we note with concern the sharp decline of such remittances experienced since 2014 and the significant impact such declines have had, especially on household disposable income.

16. We emphasize the importance of regional cooperation and integration among SPECA participating countries and with the wider Eurasian region. Hence, we urge actions that will promote our potential role as a Eurasian transit hub through the coherent development of regional infrastructure, trade facilitation, and investment promotion measures, in order to help overcome constraints resulting from being landlocked.

17. We note that there is an urgent need to address the data gaps and improve the statistical capacity of SPECA participating countries, to ensure readiness to meet the requirements of the emerging SDG monitoring architecture. Particularly, we emphasize the

need for all countries to have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics, and, in parallel, to streamline the work of national statistics offices in order to promote adaptability and cost-effectiveness.

18. We welcome the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted on 12 December 2015. In this context, we underscore the importance of cooperation among governments and other stakeholders for addressing cross-border environmental challenges including climate change and disaster risk reduction.

19. We reaffirm the important role of gender equality and the empowerment of women in catalyzing progress across all SDGs. Systematically mainstreaming a gender perspective requires accelerated and coordinated actions at national and regional levels, and we pledge increased investments and support to institutions that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, the further development of gender-disaggregated data, as well as monitoring and review.

20. We are encouraged by improvements in education and health while recognizing that many challenges remain to raise the skills and well-being of women, men and children in an inclusive drive to achieve the economic, human and social development. This will not only ensure that the educational and health-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets are met, but it will also contribute to reaching the other objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

21. We are concerned that inequality and environmental degradation continue to raise significant challenges among and within our countries. In this context, the comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an overarching framework to effectively address these issues.

22. We also recognize that protecting the rights of migrant workers and well managed migration policies are a specific focus of SDGs 8 and 10. To this end, we will make our best efforts to ensure that the rules governing international migration are effective in maximizing their contributions to the development of countries of destination and origin, while in line with international standards.

23. We call on ESCAP and UNECE to continue their efforts to revitalize and strengthen SPECA so that SPECA participating countries will be in a position to implement, review, measure, and adapt implementation of SDGs on a cooperative basis, annually, until the year 2030.

24. We encourage the Secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE to continue providing analytical work and technical cooperation to assist our efforts to achieve the SDGs through building productive capacities, diversifying our economies, undergoing structural transformation and promoting regional economic cooperation and integration. In this respect, we stress the importance and value of the annual meetings of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups to enhance cooperation and facilitate exchanges of best practices on the means and methods to achieve the SDGs.

25. We commit to seeking all ways and means of strengthening cooperation and collaboration among SPECA participating countries.

26. We express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the people and the Government of Azerbaijan for their warm hospitality, generous support and for the excellent arrangements made for the organization of the 2016 SPECA Economic Forum and the 11th session of the SPECA Governing Council held in Ganja.

27. We also express our appreciation to ESCAP, UNECE and their respective Executive Secretaries for their continued support for the development of our countries.

28. We recognise the supportive role of funds, agencies, programmes of the United Nations system in the region, the Regional UN Development Group, the Regional Coordination Mechanism of the United Nations, UNDP and the United Nations Country Teams, as well as development banks, foundations, bilateral donors, research centres and other partners of SPECA in supporting sustainable development. We encourage closer collaboration to support the efforts of governments to achieve the SDGs, and to use SPECA as a framework for further consolidation of activities in support of subregional aspects of the 2030 Agenda in Central Asia among relevant UN organizations and development partners.