

Mr Chair, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of the Regional Office for Europe of the World health organization.

The WHO warmly welcomes the entry into force of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

Environment and health has been in the European agenda of WHO for more than 20 years. Since the first Ministerial Conference on EH, held in Frankfurt in 1989, a clear understanding and consensus has been reached on the need to establish a strong and durable cooperation between the health sector (our natural ground) and the environment sector.

Many years on, intersectoral collaboration is still one of the main keywords, and has gained further prominence, as echoed in the 5th Ministerial Conference on EH, held in Parma, Italy, last year. The Parma Ministerial Declaration emphasises this, recognising, among other things, impact assessment (not for the first time) as a key instrument for achieving better health for all, through healthier environments.

Also in Parma, the governance of EH in Europe has been renewed, with the establishment of a newly designed steering body, the Ministerial Board, including 4 Ministers of Health and 4 Ministers of Environment, to testify the commitment towards cross sectoral collaboration.

The UN ECE, the EC, the UNEP are also part of the Ministerial Board, reflecting the benefits of the mutual work between WHO, the ECE, the EC and other bodies. This collaboration, on the other hand, has already produced many important achievements. I should like to mention the Protocol on Water and Health, the Pan European Programme on Transport Environment and Health, and resulted in the substantial work, still underway, on methods, strategies and tools to address health issues in SEA.

In fact, WHO is most keen to offer its expertise and its support to addressing health issues in full, within environmental assessments of different kinds.

The main challenges in environment and health, current and ahead of us require this kind of concerted action. "Old" risk factors, for example air and water pollution, chemical contamination; new or emerging issues, for example climate change, or nanotechnology; entire sector-wide questions (for example, the health implications of energy policies): all these require collaboration between different scientific communities and stakeholders, multidisciplinary efforts and taking into account the realities of our contemporary complex world.

This is why the SEA Protocol provides an excellent instrument for promoting this kind of work; this is why the WHO has been so active, over the years, to ensure that the

provisions of the Protocol included human health in a meaningful way; this is why we attach a great importance to these issues.

The WHO is committed to proceed along this route, and looks forward to future steps in this domain.