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Speech by Mr Ernst Hauri,
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Madam Chair,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Our committee was established seventy years ago, at a time when the Second World War had razed entire cities and residential areas to the ground in many countries. Housing production had come to a halt even in countries like Switzerland, which had been spared from the ravages of war. In the post-war period, there was a dire need for housing in the entire region. Tremendous efforts enabled the main bottlenecks to be resolved, but less attention was given to qualitative criteria. In the more recent past, however, the differing needs of people were increasingly taken into account in the planning of neighbourhoods and apartments. Looking back over the past seven decades, we can say that significant improvements have been made in the provision of housing to the population.

But let us now look to the future. What requirements will our apartments and neighbourhoods have to satisfy in the future? The 'Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing' and the declaration to be adopted today will set the course. In our view, three points are particularly important:

- First of all, we need good-quality housing that is and will remain affordable for all population groups. It is not acceptable that excessively high housing costs create a risk of poverty.
- Secondly, we must work towards housing conditions that encourage social integration. The aim is to create mixed neighbourhoods that both locals and migrants of different financial means can call home. And there is a need for sufficient offerings specifically for the young, the elderly and people with physical or mental disabilities.
- Thirdly, housing construction must not deplete natural resources. Here I am referring primarily to land use and energy consumption. Our towns and villages should be able to grow and expand, but not at the expense of green space. Instead, we need to consolidate already built-up settlement areas. And energy-efficient standards must become the norm.

These objectives can only be achieved if all parties involved work closely together. Here I am not just referring to the national, regional and local stakeholders gathered here today. Although synergies between them are indeed important, we should not lose sight of the potential offered by investors and planning experts. This latter group must be innovative and willing to experiment with new forms of construction and housing. And instead of hindering such activities, the public sector should guide and encourage them.

In Switzerland, there is no shortage of investors, quite the opposite in fact. Due to the low interest rate situation, rental apartments are highly sought-after investments. Currently, more housing is being built than we've seen in decades. While I cannot claim that all these new buildings fully comply with the guidelines laid down by our committee, the quality is generally high. In addition, several showcase projects have garnered national and even international attention.

Allow me to give you just one example. In Zurich, the '*mehr als wohnen*' ('more than housing') housing project has transformed an urban wasteland into a new housing community for over 1,200 residents (<https://www.mehralswohnen.ch/>). This is a comprehensive and targeted approach to sustainability. Its architecture, diversity and community support, its construction methods and 2000-watt society mobility concept are all exemplary. Housing prices are also affordable and the rental policy takes into account people who would otherwise have very limited prospects on the urban housing market. The '*mehr als wohnen*' housing community was awarded the World Habitat Award only a few months ago. This award is not just an achievement for the housing community. The city of Zurich, the canton of Zurich and the federal government can also take pride in this achievement because all three levels of government helped to make this exemplary project a reality.

Documentation of good examples and international exchange are important. They can help to ensure that housing construction throughout the entire UNECE region is aligned with sustainable development criteria. Our committee is an important platform for this. I hope that it will continue to be able to act in this capacity for another 70 years to come.

Thank you.