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**REGIONAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Information Note prepared by the ECE Environment and Human Settlements Division

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10)

1. In 1992, the United Nations convened a Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. This Conference, referred to as the Rio Conference, adopted a plan of action for the twentieth century, entitled "Agenda 21" and a set of principles underlying sustainable development (the "Rio Principles").
2. In 1997, the General Assembly held a five-year review (Rio+5) of the implementation of the decisions taken at the Rio Conference. By decision of the General Assembly, a ten-year review (Rio+10), officially entitled, "The World Summit on Sustainable Development," will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2-11 September 2002. The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development is serving as the Preparatory Committee for this event.
3. In its decision, the UN General Assembly called for the ten-year review to reinvigorate, at the highest political level, the global commitment to sustainable development. In doing so, it emphasized that the Summit, including its preparatory process, should ensure a balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. It also decided that the review would focus on action-oriented decisions in areas where further efforts are needed to implement Agenda 21.

Regional Preparations

4. The General Assembly stressed the importance of early and effective preparations for the Summit at all levels. At the regional level, the UN Regional Commissions, in cooperation with the respective regional offices of UNEP, have been requested to take the lead.

5. Similar to the Summit itself, preparations at the regional level should provide a “whole of government” approach, that is, they should involve ministries responsible for environment, development planning, finance and specific economic and social sectors, as well as ministries of foreign affairs. Preparations for 2002 should be used as an opportunity to mainstream sustainable development objectives in the policy formulation and policy implementation process. Preparations should also raise the interest of and ensure the involvement of the key stakeholders (local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the business community, trade unions, and academics) and of the public at large in the 2002 preparatory processes.

6. Regional preparations under the responsibility of UN ECE, in cooperation with UNEP, consist of the following:

i. The preparation of a **regional assessment of progress**, including main achievements over the past decade, main constraints and new initiatives and commitments at the international, sub regional and regional levels towards overcoming these constraints and fostering further progress. (Draft is available at the following Web site: <http://www.unece.org/env/rio+10/welcome.html>)

ii. The organization of a **Ministerial Regional Meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development** on 24-25 September 2001. It is the role of this Meeting to adopt a forward-looking Declaration (see iii. below), based on the assessment report. The Meeting should involve, both in its preparation and proceedings, all relevant parts of government as well as other stakeholders, as indicated in paragraph 5 above.

iii. The development and adoption of the **Declaration** by the **Ministerial Regional Meeting**. The Declaration will outline major priority directions and policies for ECE countries in order to address the key challenges related to sustainable development as they emerge from the assessment.

iv. To facilitate the elaboration of the Declaration, a **Regional Consultative Meeting** will be organized on 12-13 July 2001 in Geneva. Representatives of Governments participating in this meeting will negotiate the draft Ministerial Declaration on the basis of the priorities identified in the assessment report prepared on the progress made since the Rio Conference. Major stakeholders, including NGOs, academics and representatives of the business community are also being invited to take part in this meeting.

7. The regional preparatory process is a crucial element in the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In particular, regional views and proposals will play a decisive role in formulating the agenda and identifying issues for the World Summit.

Statistics and Sustainable Development

8. Agenda 21 contains a number of chapters directed toward action in both sectoral and cross-sectoral areas. One of these chapters, Chapter 40, is concerned specifically with information for decision-making. It focuses on the lack of good data collection, analysis and availability in many countries of the world, and it calls for the development of indicators of sustainable development.

9. In the process of drafting the regional assessment report, it was apparent that there are several countries in the region for which this problem pertains. This is particularly true for some of the member States in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The years of transition, with their attendant economic problems, have seen data monitoring and analysis capabilities diminish. There are also significant problems with data comparability across the countries of the region. It is important that work continue on identifying a set of clearly-defined indicators of sustainable development for common use.

10. Chapter 8 of Agenda 21 deals with decision-making at the national level, and it notes, inter alia, the importance of information-dependent environmental impact assessments. Within the ECE region, this has also been emphasized. In 1991, a Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (known both as the EIA Convention and the Espoo Convention) was opened for signature. One of the major new developments under the EIA Convention is the decision of the Parties to begin negotiation on a Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), bringing the principles of EIA to bear not only at the project level, but also to policies, plans and programmes.

11. Information is important for decision-makers, but it is also essential for empowering civil society and furthering democratic governance in the region. Access to information concerning the environment is enshrined within Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. It was reflected in an EU Directive of 1992 (currently being reviewed) and in decisions undertaken in the “Environment for Europe” process. In 1998, it became international law in the regional Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

12. Virtually all decisions, agreements and activities need good information, but these two conventions – the Espoo Convention and the Aarhus Convention – underscore in particular the relationship between implementation of the Rio Principles and accurate and accessible information. As ECE looks toward the next decade of progress, the contributions of the Conference of European Statisticians in supporting data for sustainable development and using, where possible, a set of common indicators, would be welcome.
