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**Statement
by**

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at

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peace, security and sustainable development"**

**Session 6: "International cooperation in environment protection
and climate change"**

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to celebrate with you International Neutrality Day and the 25th anniversary of the permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan. On behalf of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), I congratulate the government and all the people of Turkmenistan on this occasion.

Turkmenistan is a valued and active member of UNECE, and was Vice-Chair of our Commission from 2012 to 2014. As such, Turkmenistan presided over some very important reforms that we underwent during that period. UNECE greatly appreciates this strong leadership. But of course, our collaboration did not stop in 2014. I am very grateful to the Government of Turkmenistan, and to all its experts and officials who contribute to UNECE's work, for their exemplary engagement with us. My thanks also to the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan in Geneva and to its Ambassador, His Excellency Atageldi Haljanov, whom I consider a valuable colleague, for our great cooperation.

The knowledge and initiatives that our Turkmen partners have brought to UNECE have led to some very concrete and impactful achievements in the past few years. An important one to mention is under SPECA – the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, which UNECE supports together with its sister Regional Commission, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. SPECA is an effective

platform for the Central Asian countries, along with Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, to collaborate on technical topics such as water management, the rational use of the region's energy wealth, sustainable transport, trade, knowledge based development, innovation, gender equality and strengthening statistical capacity for monitoring progress. Such collaboration is absolutely necessary to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Turkmenistan chaired SPECA last year. It was a pleasure for UNECE to cooperate with the government on the “SPECA Days”, held in Ashgabat in November 2019. All who participated at the event appreciated the excellent organization by the Turkmen authorities. During the SPECA Days, participating governments adopted important outputs. These include:

- i. the Ashgabat Initiative on reducing barriers to transport and trade by using the UN legal norms, standards and best practice recommendations;
- ii. the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; and
- iii. the SPECA Strategy on Innovation for Sustainable Development.

I urge all SPECA countries to implement these. I need not remind you that innovation and sustainable trade and transport have important co-benefits for environmental preservation as well.

Let me also highlight some achievements related to environment. First of all, I commend the Central Asian countries on having developed and agreed upon the Regional Environment Programme for Sustainable Development in Central Asia.

This document was developed under the Chairmanship of Turkmenistan in the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD). It is another milestone of cooperation among the Central Asian states. Its succinct yet focused nature provides concrete actions in addressing regional and transboundary priority areas, such as:

- ensuring the availability and sustainable use of water resources and sanitation for all;
- green economy, including renewable energy;
- waste management and the development of environmentally friendly transport infrastructure;
- climate change; and
- protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems.

UNECE is committed to supporting countries in addressing the above-mentioned challenges. In 2019, the ICSD and UNECE signed a Memorandum of Understanding on environmental protection and SDG implementation in Central Asia. Another important objective of the MoU is to encourage and support the countries of the region to contribute to global and regional processes through. This can be done through UNECE frameworks, such as the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, the Environment for Europe Process, and other

related initiatives. We are particularly grateful to our colleagues from the ICSD Secretariat in Turkmenistan for their leadership and efforts in concluding the MoU.

One of UNECE's flagship environmental outputs is the Environmental Performance Review programme, initiated 25 years ago and having covered almost 30 countries. A first review of Turkmenistan was completed in 2012. I encourage Turkmenistan to consider requesting UNECE to organize a second review soon, to examine progress made since then.

Indeed, the availability of reliable, timely and internationally comparable environmental information is key to making informed decisions for the management of natural resources including water, land and air. UNECE therefore welcomes the efforts of Turkmenistan in establishing a Shared Environmental Information System. I encourage the country to complete its self-assessment for the final progress review of the Shared Environmental Information System in Europe and Central Asia. This will be one of the expected inputs to the 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, to be held in Cyprus in 2022.

Effective participation of the public in decision-making on matters relating to the environment is critical for promoting peace, security and sustainable development. This is particularly relevant for Central Asia, where environmental problems such as water availability have direct impact on people's lives. Furthermore, during critical situations such as

the COVID-19 pandemic and post-crisis recovery, building trust among governmental authorities and people, within and between countries, is more relevant than ever. UNECE hosts the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. These offer unique legal frameworks and practical instruments to assist countries in empowering people with the rights to access information, participate in decision-making and seek justice. In this regard, I express my appreciation to Turkmenistan, which enjoys the status of the first Party to the Aarhus Convention. UNECE stands ready to continue supporting your efforts in implementing these important rights.

Finally, let me touch on one natural resource whose importance is highlighted even more by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change: Water.

Transboundary water management is a key area of work in UNECE. We have collaborated with the countries of this region in many related areas, such as improving dam safety, National Policy Dialogues on water, and within the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. We provide the secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes - the Water Convention, for short. Turkmenistan is a Contracting Party, and I would like to recognize here the strong emphasis on sustainable water management by the President of Turkmenistan, and the country's strong commitment to developing water cooperation in Central Asia.

The UNECE Water Convention provides an effective legal and intergovernmental framework for water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation. It has supported the development of numerous transboundary agreements, the establishment of joint institutions and the progressive strengthening of cooperation. Since 2016, it is open to all UN Member States. We stand ready to support sustainable water management in Central Asia in any way we can.

COVID-19 has demonstrated once again the importance of access to water and sanitation for hygiene and protection from infectious diseases. Our Water Convention has a Protocol that is ideally placed to ensure this access. This Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, supports countries in improving access to water and sanitation by setting coherent water and health goals, adapted to national circumstances. Turkmenistan has already benefitted from capacity-building related to water, sanitation and health under the Protocol. We hope that Turkmenistan will soon accede to the Protocol on Water and Health, and other countries of the region too. We're ready to provide assistance in this regard.

I offer once again my congratulations to Turkmenistan on this Neutrality Day.

Thank you.