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Consideration of the high-level statement

ADVANCE COPY

The Executive Committee may wish to transmit this document to the sixty-ninth Commission for consideration.

Consideration of the high-level statement

Draft decision submitted by the Chair of the Economic Commission for Europe

The sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe decides to adopt the high-level statement contained in the annex.

Annex

High-level statement

1. Ensuring economic prosperity while addressing environmental pressures remains a challenge for our region, where many opportunities for sustainable development and sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth still need to be harnessed despite the significant progress achieved so far. We recognize that reconciling these two goals remains a key undertaking to advance sustainable development. Determined action is required in multiple areas to improve the management of natural resources for economic growth not to result in further environmental degradation. We also recognize, on the one hand, that the unprecedented crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic increases the challenges to sustainable development by reversing some of the progress made and also acknowledge the future risks posed by pandemics and climate change. On the other hand, the transition to a more sustainable economy and the improved management of natural resources holds many opportunities for building back better and can be a source of economic dynamism and increased competitiveness. More resource-efficient and circular economic approaches are the building blocks for sustainable economic models that integrate and guide policy initiatives to preserve our stock of material resources by minimising waste and promoting sustainable production and consumption.

2. We, the member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), therefore commit to step up our efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, namely by mainstreaming circularity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes – as appropriate, and through the voluntary initiatives and capacity building cooperation opportunities that have been submitted to this session of the ECE, and other voluntary commitments that were made earlier in the Environment for Europe process.

3. The work of ECE in relevant sub-programmes, sectoral committees and other subsidiary bodies can make an important contribution to foster circular and more resource-efficient economies and improve the management of natural resources in the region and beyond. ECE's varied expertise, covering multiple thematic areas, provides a fertile ground for cross-sectoral action and partnerships that are necessary to accelerate progress in accordance with the existing mandate of the Commission. Such work could contribute to: advancing sustainable transport, building sustainable energy systems and advancing sustainable forest management as well as resource-efficient use of wood; fostering environmental cooperation; facilitating the alignment of trade and urban development with sustainable practices, including building resilience to possible future crises, and providing the statistical foundation for the better understanding of ongoing dynamics and the impacts of policy actions.

4. The three functions of ECE – development of norms, standards and legal instruments, convening power, and technical cooperation across a number of relevant sectors – provide impetus for supporting more circular and resource-efficient economies in these specific areas, as they also mirror critical needs that should be addressed to facilitate the widespread adoption of this approach.

5. ECE, in its normative work, should consider the regulatory gaps that currently prevent faster development of more circular and resource-efficient economies with a view to addressing them, as appropriate. The creation of norms, standards and classifications is the result of an international dialogue that brings together the best expertise available and reflects the commitment to further progress.

6. Progress towards more circular and resource-efficient economies requires the engagement of multiple actors, in both the public and the private sectors. We affirm our commitment to engage with different stakeholders and leverage the Commission's convening role, as appropriate, to advance its work that would lead to effective action in support of circular and more resource-efficient economies in the relevant sectoral subprogrammes.

7. The improvement of natural resources management and the advancement of more circular and resource-efficient economies should be supported by strengthened international collaboration, including by enhancing technical cooperation to facilitate the adoption of the internationally agreed norms and standards and the access to policy advice as relevant. In response to corresponding requests from ECE member States, the Commission's subsidiary bodies should endeavour to provide under their competences technical assistance to interested ECE governments. ECE member States are further invited to consider sharing best practices and capacity building with interested governments in the region through ECE technical assistance projects.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that international cooperation is necessary to address the multiple challenges that this crisis has raised, including those linked to public health, climate change, food security, preserving transport connectivity and ensuring a sustainable recovery. It has shown us the great value of our transport cooperation and connectivity within the ECE and has highlighted the need for appropriate risk management and increased resilience. We remain committed to concerted action and multilateral solutions for the promotion of sustainable development and the benefit of the people of our region.

9. This unprecedented crisis is a call to immediate action, but it should not be a distraction from other pressing challenges that must be tackled. As we meet the urgent needs of the present, we should be attentive to the long-term impacts of our actions and strengthen the foundations of our sustainable development future. This is a time to act so that we build back better.

10. The COVID-19 crisis is a reminder of the need to understand and address the risks before they materialise. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the vision to anticipate and tackle multiple risks, including those of a transboundary character. We resolve to strengthen our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals as the blueprint that guides our policy actions.

11. In a world that is being shaken by the multiple impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional cooperation has acquired an increased importance to manage risks, reduce uncertainty and foster economic dynamism. There is a renewed need for solidarity and for bridging the gaps that divide us. In view of this context and the challenges ahead, the historical mandate of ECE to facilitate concerted action for the economic development and integration of the region is as relevant as ever.