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**Statement**

**by**

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**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**International online Forum in Uzbekistan**

**Building Forward Better: A COVID Green Recovery for Uzbekistan**

**3-4 March 2021**

**Opening Session**

**10:00 – 11:00 (Geneva time)**

**3 March 2021**

(7 min speech)

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to speak to you today about the opportunities for Uzbekistan to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. To begin, let me express my gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan for the organization of this very important and timely event. I also thank the co-organizers: the Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, the Center of Hydrometeorological Services under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the State Committee for Ecology and Environment Protection, UNDP, and the European Union delegation in Uzbekistan.

We are living in a challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented economic and social consequences for all countries. Governments have responded with concerted efforts to shore up public health systems and with social and economic response measures.

However, COVID-19 has also demonstrated the consequences of a lack of resilience and preparedness to deal with such a pandemic. Unfortunately, we know that the risk of further pandemics is considerable: Climate change, water pollution and the drivers of biodiversity loss, such as deforestation and habitat loss, may all cause similar issues in the future.

Therefore, both short-term and longer-term measures in countries' recovery plans should aim to deliver not only economic prosperity, but also to address pressing environmental challenges and improving environmental health.

There are several key arguments for why governments should use this unique opportunity to focus on the transformation to low-emission, resource efficient, resilient and

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environmentally-sustainable socioeconomic development:

The performance and resilience of our socioeconomic systems depend on the health of the natural environment and ecosystems. Once the COVID-19 crisis is over, we cannot return to business-as-usual practices, which generate greenhouse gas emissions and harm wildlife and biodiversity.

To recover from the COVID-19 crisis, we must put people at the centre of our response. We must maintain a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for everyone's wellbeing.

Speaking recently on his priorities for 2021, the United Nations Secretary General said, "Recovery must be also sustainable – embracing renewable energy, and green and resilient infrastructure".

Such a recovery needs a coordinated response. The UN and the leaders of countries and international organizations have a joint responsibility to combine all our efforts.

UNECE is strongly engaged at the regional and country levels to contribute to a response to COVID-19. UNECE provides a regional policy response through the work of the Regional UN System and its seven Issue-based coalitions. Just recently, the Issue-based coalition on Environment and Climate Change issued a compendium of measures to green the post-pandemic recovery. This compendium provides guidance, tools and practical examples for UN country teams to assist countries in integrating environmental and climate change into their recovery strategies.

At the country level, we stand ready to help with our numerous tools: conventions, standards and best practice recommendations, which are the product of collective intellectual input by the member States and the secretariat.

UNECE's contribution to address the crisis includes some instruments that were relevant in the initial emergency situation, such as implementation of a observatory of knowledge for border

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crossings and the use of digital tools in trade and transport.

We offer also tools that can be used to reduce risk and recover better. These include the use of UNECE multilateral agreements, standards and statistical frameworks for informed decision-making and support to a green recovery, including by improved resource use and the promotion of the circular economy.

What is needed now are innovative solutions on how to put these instruments to work, in the best interests of the countries of the region. And when we speak of innovative solutions, I would like to mention a topic which I always support: a circular economy.

I believe that efforts to achieve a circular economy can make a significant contribution to sustainable recovery and towards achieving the SDGs. UNECE member States are also of this opinion, as they have decided that the theme of the 2021 UNECE Commission session will be “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region”. I hope to see you there, at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of our Commission, to discuss this important topic.

Let me conclude by insisting on the point “Building Back Better”, which should be at the centre of every recovery strategy. We need to exploit the opportunities that this crisis brings to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in the remaining Decade of Action. Measures to boost economic growth should be well aligned with the 2030 Agenda. It is critical that they contribute to climate change mitigation by accelerating the deployment of clean energy and infrastructure. Such measures can contribute to the achievement of multiple SDGs: boosting employment, reducing air pollution and improving health outcomes. We need to seize these opportunities.

I wish you fruitful discussions and success in our common endeavours.

Thank you.

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