Excellencies, on behalf of the United Kingdom, I want to add my thanks for your dedication in driving forward UNECE’s work despite the challenges of the past year.

Since the pandemic, the theme of this Session is more important than ever. We now have an opportunity to build back better and transition towards a more sustainable way of living.

The potential benefits from a circular economy are substantial, from combatting climate change to protecting nature. The International Resources Panel indicates that about half of carbon emissions and over 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress relate to extraction, processing and manufacture.

The UK’s core focus is to move away from a linear ‘take, make, use, throw’ model, to a more resource-efficient circular economy. Our Resources and Waste Strategy for England, published in 2018, outlines our ambition to:

- work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025;
- eliminate food waste to landfill by 2030;
- eliminate avoidable plastic waste by 2042;
- double resource productivity by 2050; and
- eliminate avoidable waste of all kinds by 2050.

Our Devolved Administrations – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - have their own equivalent strategies.

The UK government is introducing the Environment Bill, a landmark piece of legislation, which will allow our environment to prosper for future generations. The Bill will introduce measures to fundamentally change the way government, businesses and individuals produce and consume products. It will make producers more accountable for the environmental impacts of their products; require a consistent set of materials to be collected for recycling from all households and businesses in England; set eco-design standards to increase product durability, repairability and recyclability and introduce charges on single-use plastic items.
This systems change is vital if we are to meet our climate objectives. Yesterday the Prime Minister’s G7 Envoy on Economic Resilience, Lord Mark Sedwill, highlighted the crucial role which technology-critical minerals play in green growth and energy transition. He launched a ‘call for action’, asking UNECE members to consider the steps we can take together to promote more circular, sustainable use of these materials.

We remain committed to funding new research and sharing expertise internationally. Our Strategic Priorities Fund has allocated £30 million to establish five circular economy research centres and a central hub which will harness industry and academic expertise to help deliver a circular economy.

A more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future will require global, regional and local collaboration. UNECE has an important role to play – as a convenor of dialogue, in developing the global standards that underpin cooperation in priority areas, and in supporting members across the region. The UK looks forward to working closely with other Members to advance this important work.