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DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**Video Message played at the
Opening of the Regional Forum on Sustainable
Development for the UNECE Region**

Geneva, 17 March 2021

Excellencies,

It is my pleasure to address this Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the lives of people, upended economies, threatened societies and dealt a major setback to our efforts to deliver the SDGs by 2030.

Countries that are members of the Economic Commission for Europe have all been deeply affected, with the pandemic which has exacerbated adverse trends such as rising inequalities, including growing gender inequality, gaps in social protection coverage and digital access, dual labour markets and high levels of informality.

But we can turn this into a watershed moment to recover better, together.

We have seen many governments - particularly in this region - respond to the economic fallout with exceptionally large fiscal and monetary stimulus packages.

We must act with the same ambition and scale to achieve the SDGs and address the climate crisis.

For this policy makers must make the tough choices and tradeoffs that are indispensable for an inclusive and sustainable recovery.

In Europe and Central Asia this means prioritizing specific investments to support the poorer regions that have been most impacted by the crisis; paying special attention to youth, women and disadvantaged groups in strengthening social safety measures; and adding key structural reforms to reduce carbon emissions and improve productivity through digitalization.

The European Green Deal; the establishment by the EU of a sustainable finance taxonomy in 2020, are important milestones in that regard.

For countries that need it, liquidity support and debt relief must also be provided, as called for by the Secretary-General in his initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond.

And we must leverage the opportunities that the landmark summits and conferences on food systems, energy, biodiversity, climate and sustainable transport offer in the months ahead to ensure that investments

made now build toward an inclusive and sustainable future.

Excellencies,

The UN development system in your region is stepping up to support your efforts. After the reform, it is now better positioned to provide joined-up policy and operational support to a sustainable recovery and acceleration of SDG progress.

The inaugural meeting of the new Regional Collaborative Platform last week concluded with clear priorities for action in 2021.

The road ahead will not be easy.

But I know that we have the tools, energy and capacity to bounce back from the pandemic and leapfrog towards the Sustainable Development Goals during this decade of action and transformation.

Ambition, urgency, scale – we count on this regional Forum and our continued work with you and partners in the region to help get us there.

Thank you and I look forward to our interaction in the plenary session this afternoon.