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Statement

by

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at

"Future-Proofing Supply of Critical Minerals for Net Zero: Cross-Sectoral Perspectives"

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to our event on “Future-Proofing Supply of Critical Minerals for Net-Zero”.

I am very pleased to see our excellent cooperation with the United Kingdom continue and flourish. Together, we thought of holding today's event as a follow-up to COP26, to reconvene audiences from Geneva and beyond, bring back the many complex topics discussed at COP, share what different organizations are doing and the climate action tools we have in place, and discuss how we can enhance our collaboration.

COP26 underlined the existential need to address climate change. For this, we must optimize our endowments of natural resources, without hindering quality of life aspirations around the world. These ambitions require integrated solutions that deliver on the environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Governments and intergovernmental organizations, including the UN regional commissions, must play their role by cooperating and sharing best practices.

We have renewable/green alternatives that can allow us to meet our climate and sustainable development goals. As the Ambassador noted, however, the challenge lies in the fast growing demand for mineral inputs to build these alternatives. To meet it, we need to move towards a circular economy paradigm through pragmatic policies. UNECE has embarked on a new nexus vision for sustainable management of resources, which emphasizes integrated solutions leading to zero harm, zero waste and a circular economy. This vision rests on a 5-point agenda, which was also included in the UN Secretary-General’s policy

brief on "Transforming the Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development.": a social contract on natural resources; a sustainable financing taxonomy; sustainable resource management using UNFC and UNRMS; transparency and traceability of the minerals value chain; and comprehensive strategic environmental assessments.

You are probably familiar with the UN Framework Classification for Resources developed by UNECE. UNFC is a tool for classifying and reporting natural resources. The UN Resource Management System, or UNRMS, under development, provides a set of standards for integrated and sustainable management of resources aligned with the 2030 Agenda. These tools help address the 5 point agenda and the issue of materials. For example, the UK and other countries have successfully tested the application of UNFC to integrate information on critical raw materials, including battery raw materials. I thank the UK and the British Geological Survey for their support for UNFC and UNRMS. I hope this cooperation can extend to other areas of mutual interest.

The 5-point agenda mentions value chains as another key factor: Indeed, the complexity and opaqueness of critical minerals value chains make it very hard to know exactly where environmental and socioeconomic impacts occur. To manage the value chain more sustainably and to transition to a low carbon/more circular economy, both consumers and businesses must first be aware of the nature and magnitude of these risks, and have the tools to measure, mitigate and prevent them. Improving the environmental, social and governance (ESG) traceability and transparency of value chains is therefore a priority.

To address this, UNECE has established a new Team of Specialists to improve ESG traceability and transparency of value chains, and promote a circular transition in key industries such as critical minerals, agri-food, fishery,

garment and footwear, transport and waste management. Their work will build on our project ‘Enhancing Transparency and Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in Garment and Footwear’, where we developed a series of policy recommendations, implementation guidelines and standard. Together, these provide practical solutions for tracking the sustainability performance of any garment or footwear from raw component to point of purchase.

The final item of the 5-point agenda is comprehensive strategic environmental assessments, and this is relevant to critical materials as well. For the mines of the future to perform better, responsibility to the planet should be the ultimate principle. We need to strengthen the one-off, project by project environmental impact assessment with an additional layer of strategic environmental assessments. Then we have a systematic process for evaluating the environmental implications of a proposed policy, plan or programme. This can help address issues at the earliest stage of decision making. UNECE has done such assessments in several countries and could support ones for the mining sector.

I conclude by wishing you a successful session and deliberations. We all have developed valuable tools to support our objectives. We should learn from each other and strengthen partnerships among International Organizations in Geneva and beyond.

I look forward to continuing the fruitful cooperation between UNECE, the UK and all the partner organizations represented here today and that contributed to this event.

Let me also assure you that this is not an ad hoc event. We already plan to reconvene to take stock of progress in April, during the UNECE Resource

Management Week.

Thank you.
