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Statement

by

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of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at the

European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction

Ministerial Roundtable

Matosinhos, Portugal, 25 November 2021 (remote participation)

Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address this important ministerial roundtable today on behalf of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and in my capacity as co-chair of the UN Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia.

All the countries of the pan-European region, including the most developed, are vulnerable to disasters - a vulnerability that is exacerbated every passing year by climate change. Just in 2021, we witnessed catastrophic floods in Germany, Belgium and Turkey and enormous wildfires in Greece, among other disasters. Hundreds of people have died and the infrastructure losses are estimated at several billions of euros. Things will continue to get worse unless countries take drastic action. This is why I'm happy to see the adoption of the EFDRR Roadmap 2021-2030 and your commitment to coordinated implementation of the Sendai Framework and related SDG targets.

If you will allow, I will briefly mention some general elements which are relevant from the UNECE perspective, and then address what the UN is doing in terms of coordinated support in the region.

UNECE is an organization whose purpose is promoting transboundary cooperation in service of economic integration, sustainable development and climate action. And our bread and butter is the development of technical norms, legal instruments and standards that can support those goals. Based on our experience, certain aspects stand out to us for implementation of the EFDRR Roadmap:

1. **Transboundary cooperation is key**, because disasters such as floods know no borders. Effective response requires transboundary or regional coordination and cooperation. The UNECE provides an effective platform for countries to come
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together and formulate such cooperation, including under legal frameworks such as the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, or the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. The Water Convention aims to facilitate cooperation to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources, with practical outcome such as the development of joint transboundary adaptation strategies in the Dniester and Neman basins. Meanwhile, the Industrial Accidents Convention is the only legal instrument for reducing the risk of technological disasters, and enhancing disaster risk governance. Yesterday, UNECE together with OECD and the EU organized a focused thematic discussion on industrial and chemical accidents in the Sendai Framework under the framework of this EFDRR, showcasing the good practice of implementing the Industrial Accidents Convention and other legal instruments of the EU and OECD.

I will not go into more detail on these important instruments, as tomorrow morning during the plenary discussion on the EFDRR roadmap, you will hear a key-note speech by my Deputy with more information.

- II. **Inclusive, multi-level governance** is needed to provide comprehensive solutions: Whether it comes to addressing the cross-sectoral impacts of disasters or the needs of different segments of the population, including the most vulnerable ones, all stakeholders must have a voice in policymaking. I urge all governments to put in place or enhance the necessary consultation mechanisms. Once again, UNECE is happy to provide examples of how this can be done and assist in implementation, and you will hear more details on this.
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III. Prevention is crucial: Of course, it is preferable for accidents and disasters to not occur at all. UNECE provides several frameworks for addressing disaster prevention, such as guidance on strategic environmental assessments or land-use siting. But I urge you also to take a more holistic view. Risks know no borders – of countries, of economic sectors or of governance levels. We need multi-hazard risk management to deal with this complex reality: Climate change is going to be the number one cause of disasters going forward, including technological incidents. Therefore, all efforts to implement the Paris Agreement, whether it is by switching to renewable energy and more circular patterns of production and consumption, reducing food waste, or increasing the energy efficiency of our buildings, can be viewed as prevention. Mainstreaming environmental sustainability into all our policies is a necessity.

Let me also address what the UN is doing to support. Addressing disaster risk reduction is very much seen as the joint responsibility of the UN system, cutting across various entities and mandates. It is an important area of cooperation within the framework of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), the central platform for UN interagency cooperation for sustainable development at the regional level.

In particular, it is tackled by the regional UN Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on Environment and Climate Change. This is a group of over 20 UN entities that provides joined-up support to member States and UN Country Teams on environmental and climate change issues in the Europe and Central Asia region. After all, disaster risk reduction - along with climate change - is one of the most pressing issues that has been identified by UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams in the region.

This is why the IBC and a specific task team under the IBC on this subject have very recently produced policy guidance on Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation, and have

also integrated the topic in broader policy and guidance documents, including to support work at the country level.

The Sendai Framework remains closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Disaster risk reduction therefore features prominently at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, the key platform for governments and other stakeholders for stocktaking and peer learning on SDGs at the regional level, which is convened annually by UNECE.

At the Regional Forum in spring this year, a round table on climate-resilient COVID-19 recovery stressed the need to integrate climate change and pandemic-related risks into recovery policies as well as into all-hazard approaches for disaster risk reduction. Synergies between disaster risk reduction and climate change strategies need to be coordinated to leverage joint impact, while being cognizant of the different paces and stages of implementation. Systemic risks can be successfully integrated into all-hazard approaches to deliver a sustainable and resilient recovery.

In 2022, the Regional Forum will take place from 6-7 April 2022 under the thematic umbrella of building back better while advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We look forward to capitalizing on the outcomes of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to the results of your discussions. Thank you for your attention.
