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Opening statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerová

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

2nd Forum of Mayors

Geneva, 4 April 2022

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you all at the UNECE second Forum of Mayors. It is heart-warming to see many of you join us in person and online. You are helping to realize the UN Secretary General's vision of "a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations", by supporting city-to-city collaboration, one that is anchored in a shared, forward-looking vision and the common aspirations set out in the Geneva Declaration of Mayors.

Over the past three years, you have made a marked contribution to our understanding of the complex issues facing cities, as well as cities' important role in fashioning people-centred, creative local solutions to the global challenges of today's world. The range of topics to be discussed this year reflects your determination to make a difference at the national, regional and global level, the basic elements that are needed for a new inclusive multilateralism.

Dear guests,

Cities have always been at the forefront of the response to emerging, as well as long-lasting economic and social challenges. This was never more evident than since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, when many of you designed and implemented innovative solutions to protect your citizens, while maintaining key public services running and inventing new ones.

There is no more compelling measure of the scale of the challenges and the urgency for a new multilateralism than the present Ukrainian crisis.

I am very concerned that the negative economic impacts of the conflict in Ukraine and the shrinking policy space in our region will have detrimental consequences on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. UNECE published last week its yearly [SDG progress report for the region](#), which showed that progress since 2020 has been too slow. With the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic not yet fully reflected in available data, and the impact of the war in Ukraine still to be assessed, the risk that the region will fail on the 2030 Agenda has never been so high.

Peace must be restored. There cannot be sustainable development without peace, and peace will not be assured without sustainable development. I hope that diplomatic negotiations will very soon put an end to this conflict.

As we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, cities across the region and beyond exchange best practices and learn from each other to address common issues. This demonstrates the depth of the connections between cities.

We count on you to lead the way in strengthening these connections; improving the resilience of UNECE cities; addressing the long-term social, economic and environmental needs of your cities; and finding local solutions to global challenges. You are a shining example of the new multilateralism. Your dedication and creativity are needed more than ever to rise to the immediate and long-term challenges facing UNECE cities and beyond. The joint initiatives and actions you undertake in your own communities are indispensable. UNECE is committed to supporting you every step of the way.

I wish you a successful Forum and look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.
