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Statement

**of Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and
United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**at the 2022 International Conference
*“Dialogue Is a Guarantee of Peace”***

Ashgabat, 12 December 2022

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Minister Meredov, dear colleagues.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the hosts and participants in this conference for inviting me and for their dedication to the ideals of peace in these difficult times.

The military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation is devastating millions of lives, causing human suffering and sent Europe, and the entire world, headfirst into a global multifaceted humanitarian, economic, financial and social crisis, the magnitude of which increases by the day. The war in Ukraine has also exacerbated some of the already complex connectivity challenges for Central Asia, while starting to redraw the map of trade and transport links, and affecting the economies of the region in a multi-dimensional way.

In wish to express my solidarity with the people of Ukraine, the millions of men, women and children impacted and displaced by the war. I travelled to Kyiv on 9-10 October to meet with Government officials to discuss UNECE support to the reconstruction of Ukraine amid bombings on the capital and several other Ukrainian cities. I wish to recall the statements of the Secretary General and to add my voice to his repeated calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

As I am just back from COP27 and going to COP15 on Biodiversity next week, we must however not let these developments distract our attention from the climate and biodiversity crises, which cause an existential threat to the mere future of humanity.

At the time when the UN General Assembly endorsed Turkmenistan's neutrality 25 years ago, the first President of the country noted that it "offered to provide a place to share 'the pilaf of peace'". Turkmenistan is a small country, facing numerous challenges, yet its stated dedication to provide a platform for dialogue as the basis for peace is commendable! President Serdar Berdimuhamedow refers now to "positive neutrality", reconfirming the offer in today's difficult situation. Dialogue is a way out of dead-end scenarios that underline the current crises. UNECE, as a platform for functional cooperation among countries with very different backgrounds, has itself experience in this matter that goes back to decades of complex international relations.

Further, I am very happy to highlight some of the areas in which UNECE currently cooperates with Turkmenistan:

In the area of environment,

- UNECE facilitates National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management (NPD). As a country which

increasingly feels stress on its water resources, Turkmenistan is encouraged to join forces with UNECE on the implementation of the Water Convention and a number of initiatives in this area.

- the country has not yet acceded to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, but UNECE works with several national agencies to prepare the ground for its accession.
- Turkmenistan became party to the Aarhus Convention in 1999 but has not acceded to the Convention's Amendment on genetically modified organisms or to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. The Aarhus Centre in Ashgabat and OSCE remain crucial capacity-building partners promoting the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol in the country and organized several events in 2021 and 2022.

In the area of Transport,

- Turkmenistan has acceded to 15 UN legal instruments on inland transport, in particular to eight in the last three years. The country is encouraged to adhere to 3 more legal instruments.
- Current UNECE projects with participation of Turkmenistan include (1) the Euro-Asian Transport Links Project (EATL), (2) Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity (trade and transport nexus) in Central Asia.

In the area of Trade and economic cooperation

- Turkmenistan just became a candidate to become a member of the WTO; UNECE has provided support through the first event for Turkmenistan's relevant agencies on WTO accession in March 2022. Next steps include an assessment of the readiness of Turkmenistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, support to digitalization of trade and circular economy.

In the area of Statistics,

- The Global Assessment of the National Statistical System, assisted by UNECE, is almost finalized.

On the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (or SPECA):

- Turkmenistan is a strong supporter of SPECA. It chaired the Programme and hosted the annual events in 2019. At that session, the Governing Council approved the Ashgabat Initiative on Reducing Barriers to Trade and Transport.
- Turkmenistan suggested establishing a SPECA Fund in 2019 and, currently, the focus is on establishing a Multiparty Trust Fund under the UN. I encourage all the SPECA countries, including Turkmenistan, to support the SPECA programme, both in terms of contributions to its **substantive work and through financial contributions**. Regional cooperation,

including through SPECA, has significant potential to help solve the key problems our region is facing today.

Finally, let me add that all these tools support the theme of our next session of the Commission in April next year: **Digital and green transformations for sustainable development**. As we are embarking, after our 75th anniversary year, on further work to shape the future of our organization together, we aim to engage young people more deliberately in our work. In this regard, I encourage Turkmenistan to include **youth delegates** in its delegations for the 70th Commission session.

Also, next spring, UNECE will host the **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development** where countries, along with other stakeholders such as civil society, will review progress towards the SDGs and exchange views on how to accelerate it. The Forum will focus in particular on SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, on SDG 17 on the Means of Implementation, including science, technology and innovation, and on SDG 7 on Affordable Clean Energy.

I wish you fruitful discussions and success in this conference and the overall path to dialogue for peace.