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Statement

by

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**Director, Office of the Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

the “Simulation Conference. Augmenting the Future”,

Alesung, 7 November 2019

Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

First, I would like to warmly thank the organizers, including Augment City and the Offshore Simulation Centre for their kind invitation to this event and their warm welcome in this beautiful city.

I am very honored to be with you here today and to share information about the role of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) in shaping sustainable development of cities and its vision for smart sustainable urban future.

But before I do that, I would like to offer some personal reflections about the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and cities.

Without going into too much historical detail, I trust that everyone in this room is familiar with the story of the United Nations.

It is a beautiful and daunting story at the same time. Out of the ashes of one of the most disastrous conflicts in human history, something new came into life: the idea about an organization that will bring together divided nations, heal the wounds of war, foster peace and bring hope and prosperity even to the darkest corners of the world. *Leave no one behind*, was the motto of the United Nations even before it became the official mantra of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The founding idea of the United Nations – that we can address some of the greatest challenges of our times only if we stand together, *united* – bears no less relevance today. What is different today, however, is that most of these challenges can no longer be solved by looking at nations – the battlefield has now moved to cities.

Over the last few decades, we have seen urban expansion on an unprecedented scale. By 2050, almost three quarters of the world's population will live in urban areas.

This pace of urbanization means enormous challenges: from housing shortages, increased air pollution, inadequate and unequal access to basic services and infrastructure, to our ever-growing vulnerability to the disasters related to climate change.

It becomes evident, then, that cities themselves are what drives a whole range of unsustainable practices: from food waste, fast fashion, private car ownership, to mention just some. This is particularly true when it comes to climate change: cities account for staggering 75% of all carbon emissions worldwide.

If we want to deal with these challenges, we can no longer afford to look only at national governments – more than ever, we need to work with cities. And we need to work together.

At the UNECE, we are fully aware of this, and are committed not only to supporting cities and local governments to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda, but also to ensuring that their voices are coming through to the member states and that they are heard well beyond their geographical boundaries.

UNECE plays an important role in shaping sustainable urban development in Europe and beyond. UNECE is a partner in United for Smart Sustainable Cities initiative, that brings together 16 UN agencies.

Together with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UN-Habitat, UNECE is part of U4SSC Secretariat that guides the course of action of the initiative.

UNECE and ITU developed the Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities in order to provide cities with a consistent and standardized method to collect data and to measure their performance and progress in becoming smarter and more sustainable.

The indicators were endorsed by governments in the UNECE region at the 77th session of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management in 2016. The KPIs are the UNECE and ITU standard.

Building on our expertise and a long-lasting legacy in driving sustainable development, UNECE is proud to have evaluated whether and how cities become smarter and more sustainable and realize the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Currently, we carry out a project which aims to evaluate performance of cities in Norway against the Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities. UNECE highly appreciates commitment of cities in Norway to this project and look forward to seeing its outcomes.

The KPIs are fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and support assessment, monitoring and achievement of the SDGs at the local level. The KPI evaluation will help the Norwegian municipalities in achieving their sustainable development and smart city goals.

I wish you a very successful and productive meeting.

Thank you.
