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Statement

by

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at the

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Excellencies, distinguished co-Chairs,
Dear Colleagues,

I would like to warmly welcome all of you to the 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region.

The world is at a critical juncture. Repeated shocks are testing the resilience of our economies and societies. Rapid technological transformations are offering new opportunities but also threaten disruption. We remain unable to reconcile increased economic prosperity with the preservation of the environment.

Amid multiple sources of uncertainty, we have seen how identified potential risks have now already become painful realities.

In our region, the scourge of war has returned. It continues to create untold suffering and undermines the very foundations of sustainable development.

The challenges ahead are significant, as we collectively grapple with the complex interplay between economic progress, environmental preservation, and social equity.

The SDG Summit brought a fresh impulse to our efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda.

We need to build on this momentum. Change is not only necessary but possible.

We have choices – choices that make a difference and will shape our future. We have to make the right choices.

And for this, we need a picture as clear as possible of where we stand and how our policy – and personal- decisions influence outcomes.

What does the latest SDG progress report, which has been prepared by the UNECE Statistical Division in cooperation with the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia, tell us?

Despite significant advances, insufficient data continues to impair our ability to assess the situation. Sufficient national data to track change over time are available only for 117 out of 169 SDG targets.

The overall picture is concerning. The negative impact of the pandemic and the war against Ukraine has started to appear in the indicators. Progress towards the SDGs was already too slow before and these shocks resulted in further performance deterioration. In the last two years, the number of targets on track to be achieved by 2030 has declined. On the basis of current trends, the region will achieve only 20 targets, which represent 17% of measurable targets.

For 80 targets, progress should accelerate. And, more worryingly, the number of targets where we are going backwards has increased – to 17 from 15 last year. In 2021, backsliding concerned only 9 targets.

Let us take a closer look at the SDGs that are under in-depth review this year and which will be discussed at the peer learning round tables over the next two days.

Extreme poverty is rare in the UNECE region. However, other targets to reduce poverty are not on track to be achieved by 2030. The share of people living in poverty according to national definitions is decreasing, but not fast enough to decline by half by 2030. In a world in transformation, where significant shifts in economic activity are to be expected, having appropriate safety nets in place is critical. While the direction of change is positive, there are still significant gaps in social protection and unemployment that need to be addressed.

The situation on food security and diversity is far from encouraging: not a single target is on track. In half of the countries, the share of adults experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity has increased since 2015. These are not just figures. These are people we are failing because something as basic as having enough food for the day remains a concern for them.

While progress is being made in some areas, it needs to be accelerated in a context in which climate change will cause increased challenges for food security.

Strong climate action is most critical, with multiple impacts across different SDGs. Here, we are facing not a self-imposed deadline but the need for a far-reaching transformation before we reach dangerous, irreversible tipping points. However, the region does not appear to be on track to meet greenhouse gas emission cuts targets. We still fail to get the basic incentives for behaviour change in place- fossil fuel subsidies have increased in most countries.

And the effects of climate change are already being felt. We are getting better prepared – as the number of national and local disaster risk reduction strategies continues to increase. But the number of people affected by disasters is growing too.

Accelerating progress toward SDGs requires strong and inclusive institutions The positive news is that decision-making bodies across the region are becoming more reflective of the population they represent. However, progress in diversity in representation remains insufficient, as women and young fall behind.

There cannot be an effective use of public resources without eliminating corruption. However, the target on the prevalence of bribery, which was previously on track, has worsened in most countries for which there is data.

While our countries are getting safer, overall progress to reduce violence across the region is too slow. Amid increased migratory movements, we are moving away further from the target to eliminate human trafficking. This dramatic development amid our affluent societies has also been underlined in the recent Report on the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the UNECE Region.

Sustainable development is a common concern that we cannot build in isolation. Partnerships for SDGs must be strengthened. Progress in many areas – from technology transfer to more open trade – is slow. In view of the ongoing digital transformation, partnerships that address the evolving forms of the digital divide are critical. The Global Digital Compact, which is supposed to be agreed at the forthcoming Summit of the Future, will shape a shared vision on digital cooperation to close this divide and harness the benefits of digital technologies for SDGs.

We will have the opportunity to exchange views on this and other themes around the Summit of the Future during our Regional Forum.

Progress, faster progress is possible. Let us send a strong push for the SDGs and a successful Summit of the Future from our region.

I wish you fruitful and interesting discussions.
