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**Opening Statement**

**by**

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**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at the**

**Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting**

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Excellences,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you today on the occasion of the Beijing+30 Regional Review and to reaffirm our shared commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender equality serves as a foundation for the entire 2030 Agenda. It is so much more than a single SDG – namely SDG5, it underpins every aspect of sustainable development, from economic growth to environmental stewardship and social equity. Without gender equality, the entire framework of the 2030 Agenda would be incomplete and unsustainable.

In this context, UNECE is fully committed to advancing gender equality throughout all aspects of its mandate. Through our work in convening intergovernmental meetings, providing technical assistance and developing evidence-based policy recommendations **I am often confronted with the misconception that our region has largely addressed the most urgent gender equality issues and that this is no longer a top priority.** This is truly a serious concern. To deprioritize gender equality is to risk undermining progress across all SDGs and to endanger the foundations of peace and stability. It is essential to recognize that gender equality remains a critical driver of sustainable progress and sidelining it would jeopardize all other areas of development.

In this context, **I want to acknowledge the** Pact for the Future, adopted by you, member States, exactly one month ago. This landmark agreement strengthens our collective commitment to human rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of women. It serves as a renewed call for concrete action that places responsibility on each of us to ensure that these principles are effectively implemented in our respective countries and across the region. It is not enough to make commitments - we must be accountable for delivering real results.

This leads us to two crucial priorities of this regional review: implementation and accountability. True progress is contingent on timely and concrete actions. While we may have strong frameworks and commitments, their success ultimately depends on how effectively we translate them into real change on the ground. Equally important is the need for robust accountability mechanisms. We must have systems in place to track progress, assess shortcomings, and hold ourselves accountable for the commitments we've made. Without such mechanisms, our efforts will fall short, and the vision of gender equality will remain out of reach.

In considering the prioritisation of women's rights agenda, it is important to look at the available evidence from our region. I would like to highlight three key areas of focus that call for our urgent attention:

First of all, it is women's economic empowerment. Across the UNECE region women's participation in the labour force remains a critical challenge. Women continue to be more often employed in lower-paying sectors and underrepresented in leadership positions. Efforts to improve the economic status of women through policies that promote pay equity, access to entrepreneurship opportunities, and targeted support for women in STEM fields are vital. We

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must ensure that women have equal opportunities to thrive in all sectors of the economy - this requires sustained investment in gender-responsive policies, active labour market initiatives, and effective measures to reconcile work and family life.

Second, the increase in gender-based violence, which continues to be one of the most significant obstacles to achieving full gender equality. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this challenge, leading to higher rates of domestic violence and exposing gaps in the availability of support services for survivors. Additionally, technology-facilitated violence, such as online harassment and abuse, has emerged as a growing concern in our region. We must intensify efforts to combat all forms of gender-based violence and ensure that robust legal frameworks and support systems are in place for victims.

Third, the disproportionate impact of conflicts on women and girls. As highlighted by the ongoing war against Ukraine, women and girls are disproportionately affected by war and displacement. Conflicts exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and expose women to higher risks of gender-based violence, trafficking, and economic hardship. Addressing these gendered impacts of conflict is critical to building resilient and peaceful societies. In our work, UNECE has integrated gender equality considerations into urban recovery projects in conflict-affected areas, ensuring that women's perspectives are part of the rebuilding process. An example of this is our work done through the UN for Ukrainian Cities initiative and masterplan concepts for Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv.

Distinguished delegates,

It is clear that gender equality is not an isolated goal but a prerequisite for the success of all other development objectives. It is integral to the realization of all 17 SDGs, from poverty reduction to good health, quality education, decent work and climate action. In addressing gender equality, we are laying the foundation for a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

As we gather for this first regional review of the Beijing+30 process, we set the stage for the upcoming reviews by other UN regional commissions over the next two months. Our discussions today will not only shape the course for gender equality in our region but also serve as a model for other regions. Let us seize this opportunity to set ambitious goals, adopt strong language and commitments, and create a roadmap that will lead to real and lasting improvements in the lives of women and girls across the UNECE region.

Last but not least, we have a large participation of the civil society representatives, including very important groups representing the youth or persons with disabilities. They have been already working hard over the weekend to consolidate and reinforce our agenda and discussions today. Let's make sure that these voices are not only heard but also listened to.

Today, I encourage all of us to rise to the occasion - to come together in unity and solidarity in order to uphold women's rights, and to address the challenges that lie ahead with urgency and determination. Let us celebrate the resilience, strength, and contributions of women, and let us commit ourselves to accelerating progress toward a world where gender equality is not just a goal, but a lived reality for all.

Thank you.

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