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Statement

by

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at the

Parallel event of the United Nations Regional Commissions

**Regional perspectives on climate action for sustainable development:
synergies between the SDGs 2030 and the NDCs**

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Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The need for urgent action has never been more acute: global greenhouse gas emissions continue to grow while the scientific evidence of the devastating effects of climate change is mounting. We are running short of time: delaying action now means that stronger measures would be needed later. And the risks of negative consequences will increase.

The European region is mostly on track to meet stated NDC targets, according to existing policies, as reflected in the latest UNEP Emissions Gap report – but we need to translate those policies into specific actions and to raise the level of ambition. Those targets are not enough. We are far from being where we should be, although we are moving in the right direction.

Why is climate change mitigation action proving so difficult? In short, because the positive effects are shared and cannot be felt immediately, while costs are certain and are borne by whoever undertakes the action. International cooperation is absolutely essential to address this existential threat.

Reducing carbon emissions from fossil fuels has also other benefits beyond contributing to climate change mitigation. The most significant one is the reduction of ambient air pollution and the associated improvement in health outcomes. The annual welfare costs of premature mortality due to ambient air pollution in our region are truly staggering – around 3.8% of GDP in the EU and 6.8% in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, according to the OECD database. Investing in an energy transition that reduces the use of polluting fossil fuels would have a positive return in terms of improved health of the population.

UNECE helps its member countries in combating air pollution, including through the work carried out under the Air Convention. But its activities are also contributing to address emissions in one of the sectors where this is most difficult: transport. This includes our work on electric and automated vehicles and the development of Intelligent Transport Systems.

Rapid progress in climate change mitigation requires new forms of mobility. This will demand not only new cars but also regulations and infrastructure that facilitate multimodality. Good design can result in increased efficiency and speed while reducing the environmental footprint.

Work at the city level provides a fertile ground to devise mobility solutions that not only improve the life of citizens with immediate effect but also make a contribution to climate change mitigation. Investments in mobility may also help to avoid social exclusion and increase employment opportunities. Cities are important actors of change to advance sustainable development and UNECE is reaching out to them through various initiatives, including through the organisation of an annual Forum of Majors.

There is also a clear positive relationship between reducing material intensity (i.e. the consumption of resources per unit of GDP) and climate change mitigation. Progress towards a circular economy, where waste is reduced and reutilisation increased, implies a lower demand for energy, thus contributing to climate change mitigation. It means also more competitive economies. In the EU, for example, it is estimated that a circular economy model could reduce emissions by more than 50%. UNECE is paying increased attention to this issue through its various strands of activity, including, for example, key regulatory and normative work on resource classification and traceability of goods.

The benefits of climate change mitigation will be widely shared. However, the costs will be more concentrated, thus stirring opposition to the necessary transformation.

Negative distributional consequences may also take place, as low-income households may be more affected. This requires addressing these adverse implications through policies that are well targeted. Such initiatives may include skills upgrading to facilitate the relocation of labour, regional development plans and outright income transfers.

There are potential trade-offs between climate change mitigation and some SDGs that will need to be carefully managed. However, the potential synergies are very large, as highlighted by the IPCC Special Report Global Warming of 1.5°C. Tapping into these synergies will increase the effectiveness of policy actions while helping to overcome the obstacles that prevent more rapid progress. Attracting private investors to these transformative efforts requires strong and credible policy signals. It also demands a leading role of the public sector in providing critical investments that pave the way private sector involvement.

We all have a responsibility, a role to play in ensuring a rapid energy transition that leaves no one behind.

Thank you for your attention.