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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the Third UNECE Forum of Women Entrepreneurs

**“Building partnerships to close the entrepreneurship gender gaps
in the UNECE region”**

Baku, Azerbaijan, 14-15 November 2012

Excellences,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the Third UNECE Forum of Women Entrepreneurs in the beautiful capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. I wish to express my gratitude to the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting this very important event and for excellent cooperation with UNECE in the area of Gender and Economy.

This Forum has gathered policymakers, representatives of the business community (female and male entrepreneurs) and academia, as well as other stakeholders, including international organizations from the UNECE region and beyond. Many of you have travelled from far to share your experience and discuss challenges of doing business in your countries during the stagnation in which the world has been mired for the last few years. I wish to thank you all for your efforts and time.

Women's economic empowerment is a key objective of inclusive growth and sustainable development in its own right as reaffirmed in the outcome document *The Future We Want* of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). We, in UNECE, attach highest priority to women's entrepreneurship development as an important avenue for economic empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality in all realms of our life. Promoting women's economic independence and facilitating their success as entrepreneurs is a smart investment with positive and economic returns. Yet, the potential of women entrepreneurs has not been fully explored in many countries, including in our region.. The current global economic and financial crisis has underscored the need to widen the prospects of women entrepreneurs, to enable them to join the markets and contribute to the development of more competitive economies driven by knowledge and innovation.

For the past decade, women's entrepreneurship development has been at the centre of the UNECE Gender and Economy Programme which promotes partnerships to increase the potential of women entrepreneurs in the region. In 2001 and 2003, UNECE organized two fora for women entrepreneurs which provided a region-wide platform for exchanging experiences and good practices

among all member states. To name a few of more recent activities, we have also conducted policy research on the assessment of the business environment in Central Asia in 2010-2011, and a policy seminar on creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs in 2011.

I would like to assure you that UNECE will continue to implement the strong mandate of the international community to promote women's opportunity in all areas of our work. Our endeavours will remain focused on providing a gender lens in economic policies towards creating lasting, sustainable improvements in the policy environment for women, as well as on capacity building in the area of gender statistics, and upgrading skills of women entrepreneurs in the ECE region. Through these activities, we will contribute to the Secretary General's five year action agenda as it relates to women and young people.

In conclusion, let me wish you every success in your endeavour in further strengthening strategic partnerships, to close gender entrepreneurial gaps in our region.