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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe input to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review

Summary

In response to the General Assembly resolutions (A/RES/67/290 and A/RES/61/16), the Regional Commissions have been asked to provide regional inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Annual Ministerial Review. The ECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) discussed the ECE contribution for these meetings on the basis of an ECE secretariat paper entitled, *Key messages for the post-2015/SDG process from the perspective of ECE*. Below is the Chairperson's summary of such consultations.

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I. Chairperson's Summary

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolutions (A/RES/67/290 and A/RES/61/16), the Regional Commissions have been asked to provide regional inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Annual Ministerial Review. The ECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) discussed the ECE contribution for these meetings on the basis of an ECE secretariat paper entitled, *Key messages for the post-2015/SDG process from the perspective of ECE*.

2. In the discussion the member States emphasized the important role of ECE in the implementation and monitoring of its future sustainable development agenda. They stressed that the ECE has an extensive and diversified work programme which is focused entirely on contributing to sustainable development by means of concrete and results-oriented activities that address the needs of countries of the region and beyond. These activities are carried out in eight broad areas of work or subprogrammes: environment, transport, statistics, economic cooperation and integration, sustainable energy, trade, timber and forestry, and housing, land management and population. ECE's future priorities and activities have been formulated in Commission Decision A (65) which was adopted by unanimity on 11 April 2013 following an intensive two-year intergovernmental consultation process.

3. Member States emphasized that their views expressed in the discussions are not to be interpreted as agreed positions in the ongoing global negotiations of the post-2015 development agenda and do not pre-judge the outcomes of those negotiations.

II. ECE's sectoral activities in promoting sustainable development

4. Much of the discussion focused on ECE's contribution to the promotion of sustainable development and how ECE's activities could assist in the implementation of the future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region and beyond. Member States highlighted a number of specific tools and instruments developed by ECE that could provide an important contribution to the implementation of the new development agenda. There was a general consensus on the importance of ECE's sectoral activities in promoting sustainable development; differences expressed in the discussion reflected more subtle distinctions in emphasis regarding the importance of subprogramme activities. The discussion was organized around major areas of ECE programme activities and can be summarized as follows:

5. **Environment:** The ECE manages 5 multilateral environmental agreements and numerous protocols (on water, air, industrial accidents, public access to information, and environmental impact assessment) that set standards and create obligations. Implementation is monitored by regular meetings of the parties and of special implementation committees. Significant technical assistance and capacity-building efforts are undertaken to help member States comply with the agreed standards and policies.

6. Member States highlighted the importance of the ECE Water Convention as a flagship instrument that addresses transboundary water issues in the regional context, as the majority of freshwater resources are transboundary. The Convention obliges Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way and ensure their sustainable management.

7. Speakers drew attention to the ongoing work under the Convention on the nexus "water, energy and food" in transboundary basins which shows the importance of linking and implementing SDGs jointly. Its protocol on water and health, on preventing water-borne diseases, was also considered an excellent tool for the implementation of SDGs, linking water management with water supply and sanitation, information and public participation.

8. The ECE Aarhus Convention promotes public participation, access to environmental information and justice. A number of speakers stressed that they considered the involvement of civil society, effective public participation, and transparent and accountable governance as critical for making the post-2015 agenda work. Broad involvement of the public, including in their role as community members, voters, consumers or shareholders, could contribute to better decision-making, planning and implementation of policies and programmes at all levels.

9. The ECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) and its eight protocols tackle cross border air pollution by means of emission standards and other measures, including monitoring and reporting. The importance of the work of the Convention was underscored by references to recent WHO studies indicating that 3.7 million premature deaths worldwide were attributable to poor air quality in 2012 and most occurred in low- and middle-income countries. Air pollution was now understood to be a far more significant public health risk than previously known.

10. The ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development strives for education at all levels that will make children and adults more cognizant and knowledgeable on sustainability issues. It was considered an important tool that would contribute to changing behavioural patterns. The approach of the Strategy was to encourage countries to include ESD in their education systems, in all forms, from primary to tertiary, including vocational and adult learning.

11. Member States noted the importance of ECE's collaboration with the European Environment Agency on the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), a system for sharing vital environmental information to allow policy-makers to take informed decisions that promote sustainable development.

12. **Transport:** The ECE has the overall objective of promoting affordable, safe and clean transport and, for that purpose, it manages fifty-eight international transport agreements. Speakers considered transport as central to economic and social development and a driver for sustainable growth, by providing access to markets and supply chains. Transport was not included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework and might, therefore, not have been seen as a political or financial priority for development policies. Many people still do not have access to affordable, safe and clean transport, and many countries lack efficient and affordable access to world markets. Transport is also one of the key areas in ensuring the shift to sustainable low-carbon societies. By making mobility safer, cleaner and more efficient, the transport sector can meet its full potential in contributing to sustainable development.

13. Some member States highlighted the Pan-European Programme on Transport, Health and Environment (THE PEP) as a platform for sharing knowledge and best practices on integrated approaches to transportation, health and environment issues, focusing on informing, enabling and encouraging policy formulation and action at sub-national and national levels. Its focus on the nexus of transportation, health, and the environment was considered critical for fully understanding the challenges posed by rapid global urbanization – and

accompanying transportation demands – for the environment and human health. THE PEP and its work to promote policies and actions conducive to safe, accessible, low emissions modes of transport was deemed highly relevant to today's urban environment.

14. **Statistics:** Developing the necessary measurement approaches and indicators and creating monitoring mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda was considered essential for the effective implementation of the new development framework. New statistical measures would be needed to complement existing statistics and to capture all relevant dimensions of sustainable development. A key reference in this regard is "The Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development", a publication prepared by ECE in cooperation with OECD and Eurostat. ECE's work on poverty measurement could contribute to improving the international comparability and availability of statistics on poverty and the related metadata. In terms of overall monitoring, a multi-layer monitoring mechanism would need to include a strong regional and subregional component, including the possibility of regional peer reviews. Indicators might need to be tailored to specific regional and national conditions and possibly differentiated by categories of countries.

15. **Economic Cooperation and Integration:** Member States agreed that achieving the SDGs would require forging alliances on equal footing among different partners. They consider Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as an effective instrument for engaging the private sector and mobilizing resources for long-term financing in key sectors for sustainable development, such as infrastructure, health and energy. However, it was critical to, inter alia, develop the most appropriate models of financing through PPPs, monitor the enabling environment, remove the barriers to their development and involve stakeholders such as the business community in meeting the future SDGs.

16. Member States also highlighted ECE's work aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of member States' economies by promoting a knowledge-based innovative economy as well as by facilitating the development of entrepreneurship and the emergence of new enterprises, and improving corporate responsibility. ECE also facilitates the development of effective regulatory policies and corporate governance, including those in the financial sector by promoting public-private partnerships for domestic and foreign investment.

17. **Sustainable Energy:** The ECE has the overall objective of providing access to energy for all in the region and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the carbon footprint of the energy sector. Member States emphasized ECE's concrete and results oriented activities in five main areas:

18. Cleaner electricity production experts are preparing a paper for the UNFCCC on the possible use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) to reduce CO₂ emissions and look at the efficiency of power plants. Coal mine methane experts are preparing best practices on capturing and using methane from coal mines and coal mine beds so as to reduce leakages and prevent explosions. Natural gas experts are studying the role of gas as a back-up to renewable energy; ways to reduce gas leakages at production sites and across transportation and distribution networks; the use of gas for transport; and the role of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Renewable energy experts are studying ways to provide communities that have no access to energy with access to renewable energy. Experts are drawing up a matrix of measures that Member States could take to significantly improve energy efficiency ("low hanging fruit" measures) and are setting up a "scoreboard" to monitor implementation of those measures. Finally geologists from around the world are discussing the classification of mineral reserves and energy resources including renewable energy.

19. **Trade:** Trade is one of the key drivers for sustainable economic growth. The ECE undertakes comprehensive and results-oriented activities by developing and maintaining effective international trade-related instruments, norms, standards and recommendations, in response to the needs of the global economy. ECE actively contributes in reducing barriers to trade in goods and services through greater implementation of international and ECE norms, standards, instruments and recommendations, especially in trade facilitation.

20. In this regard, some member States drew attention to the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) which is managed jointly by ECE and ESCAP. They expressed the view that SPECA served as an efficient and useful results-oriented tool for the promotion of sustainable development at a subregional level. SPECA was addressing crucial issues of regional cooperation taking advantage of international legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations.

21. Several speakers noted that ECE's trade and transport subprogrammes also addressed the special development needs of Land Locked Developing Countries. Trade opportunities for these countries were limited by inadequate road connections, transit and access to the nearby sea ports. ECE should assist in addressing these issues through its participation at the regional level in the implementation of the outcome document of the Vienna conference on the Almaty Programme of Action in the areas of freedom of transit, trade facilitation and international trade.

22. **Forestry and Timber:** ECE, through its integrated programme of work on forests with FAO, has the overall objective to support member countries and other stakeholders in their efforts to sustainably manage and use forests by providing the best available information; facilitating dialogues and communication; as well as building capacity in the region.

23. Member States underlined that forests and trees are of critical importance for sustainable development. Managing forests well is an effective and universal way to progress towards sustainability. It was essential to step up efforts to manage and use forests so that they provide products and ecosystem services to benefit society in a sustainable way. As a regional contribution in this context, a set of key targets and indicative indicators was developed at an ECE/FAO expert workshop, which stressed the need to integrate the social and cultural benefits, the resilience and ecosystem benefits, and the green economy contribution of forests and trees in the future development framework.

24. In contrast with tropical forests, which face destruction and degradation, boreal and temperate forests are growing and well managed in most countries of the ECE region. However, due attention should be given to addressing deforestation and forest degradation which remain or are reappearing in some areas mainly due to urbanization. Moreover illegal logging and related trade should be addressed, when they occur in the region or are induced through imports from other regions, by developing sustainable pattern of production and consumption.

25. In order for the forest sector to lead the transition towards the green economy in the ECE region, member States have adopted the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the forest Sector in a Green Economy. Their commitment to its implementation, in cooperation with key stakeholders from the private sector and other relevant organizations is a priority for the region.

26. **Housing and Land Management:** With more than half of the global population and about three quarters of the ECE population living in urban areas, member States emphasized that moving towards sustainable cities would go a long way towards addressing today's challenges. There was limited access to affordable and healthy housing. The housing sector was responsible for a significant share of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides had caused considerable damage to the housing stock. Addressing these challenges would involve supporting green, inclusive, healthy, compact, smart and resilient cities, investment in the housing sector, efficient land use, property registration and a sound financial system, as laid out in the current ECE Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management.

27. **Population:** Upon the request of the UN General Assembly, ECE provides relevant regional inputs in preparing, implementing and reviewing the UN instruments in the area of population and related social development issues. ECE works on the regional implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and helps prepare ICPD beyond 2014. Member States noted that the increasing share of older persons in society and the decline in the working-age population had become an increasing concern in the ECE region and beyond, with important and far-reaching implications for social security, health care, labour markets and other areas. ECE provides a unique expert platform for formulating recommendations on efficient and comprehensive public policies aimed at addressing the economic impacts of ageing. Inclusion of population dynamics, especially ageing and migration, is essential in the future development agenda.

28. **Gender:** Several speakers emphasized that advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential for achieving sustainable development and therefore need to be an important component of the post-2015 development framework. They highlighted ECE's role as the forum for regional reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action and its contribution to the economic empowerment of women through the exchange of good practices in mainstreaming gender into economic policies in the region.

III. Overall scope of the new post-2015 framework

29. In the course of the discussions it was apparent that there was broad common understanding as to the basic objectives of the post-2015 agenda. The post-2015 agenda should reinforce the international community's commitment to poverty eradication and sustainable development and set out a single comprehensive and coherent framework for effective delivery and results at all levels. There should be a proper balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development, both in the focus areas and in the targets. Linkages between different areas should be taken into account so that progress in one area did not come at the expense of setbacks in another.

30. The SDGs should maintain the fundamental parameters laid out in the outcome of the "Rio +20" Conference with its focus on practical actions, concise and comprehensive formulations, aspirational character, and universality and applicability to all countries. In addition, it was important to consider applying the lessons learned from the MDGs and finding ways to integrate them into the SDGs. Once the agenda was agreed, the Regional Commissions would have a role in monitoring and gathering information about the implementation of the SDGs.

31. However, in a few areas member States maintained different views. Some countries felt that it was important to have a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights. They stated that justice, equality and equity, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality were essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, and that peace and security were a fundamental development outcome. Others, however, expressed the view that the introduction of these issues would go beyond the political agreements reached at the Rio+20 Conference and that, at the practical level, they could not be transformed into measurable goals, targets and indicators.

32. Other issues raised by some countries included the necessity of having climate change integrated in any post-2015 framework. Some countries noted the need for additional sources for financing of the SDGs and suggested that the broader involvement of other global partners, such as multinational corporations, should be encouraged, and the nature of their cooperation needed to be defined.

33. Member States agreed that the above issues were being discussed in the global negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and that they should therefore not be further debated at the level of ECE.

IV. Key messages for the post-2015/SDG process from the perspective of ECE

Discussion Paper by the secretariat ECE (5 June 2014)

Introduction

34. Background and purpose: A major input from the ECE region to the intergovernmental process for formulating the post-2015 agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the outcome of the Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (Istanbul, 7-8 November 2013), which helped formulate the regional priorities across a range of cross-sectoral issues. This Discussion Paper complements the broader Istanbul priorities with more specific considerations emanating from ECE's areas of work. It serves for discussion by the Executive Committee (EXCOM) and, together with a Chair's summary of EXCOM's discussion, will be submitted to UNDESA as an input from the ECE region to the global discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF, New York, 30 June to 9 July 2014) and the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), in response to the request to Regional Commissions to provide such inputs.

35. Structure: The paper focuses on a number of issues that are of particular relevance to the ECE region in the post-2015 framework, and where ECE has unique instruments and tools to offer for the transformation to sustainable development, including, in particular: cities, transport, forests, water, population, public participation, education for sustainable development, Public- Private Partnerships, and statistics and measurement. The paper argues that these issues need to be duly incorporated in the SDGs framework in order to arrive at a truly transformative agenda. In addition, it is crucial to take into account the linkages between the different areas in order to make the new framework fully coherent and consistent.

V. Key issues for the integration in the SDG framework from the perspective of ECE

36. While ECE is dealing with a number of globally relevant issues (e.g. sustainable energy), the focus of this paper is on issues for which ECE has developed specific instruments or regional policy goals and targets. Incorporating and explicitly reflecting these issues in the SDGs will help promote sustainable development in the region.

37. Sustainable cities: With more than half of the global population and about three quarters of the ECE population living in urban areas, moving towards sustainable cities will go a long way towards addressing today's challenges. There is limited access to affordable and healthy housing. The housing sector is responsible for a significant share of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides have caused considerable damage to the housing stock. Addressing these challenges will involve supporting green, inclusive, healthy, compact, smart and resilient cities, investment in the housing sector, efficient land use, property registration and a sound financial system, as laid out in the current ECE Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management. The vital role of housing, urban development and land management should be given due consideration in the SDGs.

38. Transport: Transport is central to economic and social development and a driver for sustainable growth, by providing access to markets and supply chains. In spite of this, it has not been included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework and has, therefore, not been seen as a political or financial priority for development policies. Many people still do not have access to affordable, safe and clean transport, and many countries lack efficient and affordable access to world markets. Transport is also one of the key areas in ensuring the shift to sustainable low-carbon societies. By making mobility safer, cleaner and more efficient, the transport sector can meet its full potential in contributing to sustainable development. It is therefore crucial that transport priorities be reflected in a coherent and comprehensive way within the Sustainable Development Goals.

39. Forests: Forests and trees are of critical importance for sustainable development. Managing forests well is an effective and universal way to progress towards sustainability. It is essential to step up efforts to sustainably use forests so that they provide products and ecosystem services to benefit society. The full integration of the benefits of trees and forests in the SDGs is both desirable and feasible. As a regional contribution in this context, a set of key targets and indicative indicators was developed at an ECE/FAO expert workshop, which stressed the need to integrate the social and cultural benefits, the resilience and ecosystem benefits, and the green economy contribution of forests and trees in the future development framework.

40. Water: Water is fundamental for human development, the environment and the economy. Protecting water resources from over-exploitation and pollution, meeting the needs for safe drinking water, sanitation, energy, agriculture and other uses, tackling water-related disasters and improving water governance are important elements that should be incorporated in a future water SDG. In particular, the experience of the ECE Water Convention suggests that addressing transboundary water issues in the SDGs will be crucial since the majority of freshwater resources, in particular in the ECE region, are transboundary. The Convention obliges Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way and ensure their sustainable management.

41. Population: Changes in the growth, structure and geographical distribution of human populations have important environmental, social and economic implications. The increasing share of older persons in society and the decline in the working-age population have become an increasing concern in the ECE region and beyond, with important and far-reaching implications for social security, health care, labour markets and other areas. Inclusion of population dynamics, especially ageing, migration and sexual and reproductive health is thus essential in the future development agenda. However, ageing and migration have so far not received sufficient attention in the global SDG discussions.

42. Participation and education for sustainable development:

- Public participation: The involvement of civil society, effective public participation, and transparent and accountable governance are critical for making the post-2015 agenda work. Broad involvement of the public, including in their role as community members, voters, consumers or shareholders, contributes to better decision-making, planning and implementation of policies and programmes at all levels. Access to information and effective judicial and administrative proceedings are also essential to the promotion of sustainable development. Governance issues should therefore be prominently reflected in the SDGs. The ECE Aarhus Convention is a unique instrument to further these principles by providing twin protection of the environment and human rights and promoting public participation, access to environmental information and justice.
- Education for Sustainable Development: Education at all levels will make children and adults more cognizant and knowledgeable on sustainability issues, and will contribute to changing behavioural patterns. The approach of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is to encourage countries to include ESD into all forms of their education systems from primary to tertiary, including vocational and adult learning. In view of the importance of education and learning to advance sustainability, Education for Sustainable Development should be given higher attention in the process of formulating the SDGs.

43. Public-private partnerships (PPPs): Contributing to achieving the SDGs requires means of implementation and concrete projects. This will require forging alliances on equal footing among different partners. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have the potential to be an effective instrument for engaging the private sector and mobilizing resources for long-term financing in key sectors for sustainable development, such as infrastructure, health and energy. Here it is critical to inter alia develop the most appropriate models of financing through PPPs, monitor the enabling environment, remove the barriers to their development and involve stakeholders such as the business community in meeting the future SDGs.

44. Measurement and statistics: Developing the necessary measurement approaches and indicators and creating monitoring mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda will be essential for the effective implementation of the framework. New measures will be needed to capture all relevant dimensions of sustainable development. A key reference in this regard is "The Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development", a publication prepared in cooperation with OECD and Eurostat. A multi-layer monitoring mechanism will include a strong regional and sub-regional component, in addition to monitoring at the global and national levels, to ensure proper follow-up, for instance through regional peer reviews.

VI. Linkages among the key issues

45. Taking into account the interconnections between different areas is a major challenge in formulating the SDGs. Progress in one area must not come at the expense of setbacks in another. Therefore, an integrated approach in designing and implementing the post-2015 agenda is needed. For example, policies and programmes in the water sector are inextricably linked to those in the forest, housing and many other sectors. Trends in the water sector can be reinforcing or detrimental to development in other sectors. These repercussions should be captured when formulating goals and targets in order to arrive at a coherent and consistent policy agenda.

VII. Conclusions

46. The key areas referred to in the paper need proper attention within the SDGs. The global goals will likely come with responsibilities for all countries. They will therefore have to be both sufficiently broad in order to capture the specific circumstances in different countries and capable of taking into account commonalities among countries, for instance within one (sub-) region.

47. In addition, it will be very important to develop mechanisms for monitoring and reporting, once the SDGs will have been adopted. This is an area in which the regional level is likely to be heavily involved and in which the role of the Regional Commissions will be crucial. Discussions will be needed on what such (sub-)regional monitoring could look like, including how other key stakeholders, such as the private sector and local authorities, could be involved.
