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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**

**Opening of the 2025 UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

**Geneva, 2 April 2025**

Excellencies, distinguished Co-Chairs,  
President of ECOSOC, colleagues,

A warm welcome to the 2025 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region!

Your presence here today sends a powerful message: Despite instability, despite shifting global priorities, and despite multiple crisis, we must remain committed to the 2030 Agenda. In fact, by doing so, we tackle many of the challenges we face head-on.

The world is at a critical juncture. In recent years, a series of shocks – economic, environmental, social, and geopolitical – have tested our resilience. They have exposed the fragility of our systems. They have deepened inequalities. They have placed sustainable development under threat at precisely the time when we should be accelerating progress.

Sustainable development is not an abstract goal. It is about people's lives. It is about actions at the national and local level on jobs, health, education, and our shared environment. It is about the kind of future we want to build together.

Across our region, we see the consequences of inaction. War is eroding stability and development. Geopolitical tensions are straining multilateral cooperation. The cost-of-living crisis is pushing more people into precarity. Inequalities persist—across gender, age, income, and geography.

At the same time, we see hope. The demand for action is growing louder. Communities, businesses, and young people are pushing for change. Governments are starting to respond. The UN system is pulling together at the country level like never before – providing coordinated support.

Cities and local governments – where the majority of our region's population live – are also playing an increasing role, demonstrating how global commitments can be translated into real results.

We will see the SDG stock-take later in this session. Progress is slowing. Only 21 of 169 targets are on track. And nowhere is the challenge greater than in climate action and environmental sustainability. This should concern us all. The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat – it is here, disrupting lives, economies, and ecosystems.

To change course, we have the knowledge. We have the ideas. Now we need more action. We must ask ourselves: What will it take to deliver on our commitments? How do we ensure that the green and digital transitions create more and better jobs, rather than deepen inequalities? How do we align public and private finance with sustainable development priorities? How do we build trust in multilateralism at a time when skepticism is growing?

The 2030 Agenda is not a menu of options – it is a contract for nothing less than economic and social transformation within planetary boundaries. Yet we are running out of time to deliver on

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it.

Stronger partnerships will be crucial. Sustainable development requires collaboration—across sectors, across borders, across disciplines. That is why the Regional Forum remains critically important. It is OUR space to bring together governments, international organizations, civil society, youth, businesses, local authorities, and academia. It is a space for solutions, for innovation, for accountability.

I would like to see more young people engaged in the Forum. More people from the diverse range of civil society in the region. More senior leaders from government and business. For our part, UNECE will seek to grow that engagement in the final five years of the Goals. We ask for your support.

The Pact for the Future, adopted at last year's Summit of the Future, reaffirmed the commitment to the 2030 Agenda. The region already sent a strong message on the importance of gender equality and women's economic and political empowerment when we reviewed progress on Beijing + 30. Later this year, new impetus is expected from key global summits this year on social development and financing for development.

Here at the Regional Forum we have an opportunity to contribute to these processes by shaping regional perspectives, strengthening partnerships, and driving action. We are now in the tenth year of the SDGs. We cannot afford to wait. The time for bold action is now.

I wish us all productive discussions, renewed determination, and a firm commitment to turning words into action. Thank you.

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