

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

“Ensuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE Region in times of multiple crises”

Opening remarks of the President of ECOSOC

29 March 2023

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to join you at the opening of this Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. On behalf of the Economic and Social Council, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Economic Commission for Europe for its leadership in bringing together all of the stakeholders from across Europe. This Forum is a milestone in the series of critical events in the lead up to the July high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF). The HLPF itself is a stepping-stone to the SDG Summit in September.

You are meeting at an important time. The issues and topics on your agenda mirror those that top the minds of your citizens. They see them in the headlines and in their social media feeds:

- The rapid onset of climate change impacts,
- Geopolitical tensions affecting food, energy and fuel prices around the world,
- Inflation and continued slow economic growth.

This is why the outcome of your discussions on the theme you have chosen: *“Ensuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE Region in times of multiple crises”* is of great interest to the HLPF.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will be reviewed later this year at the Summit is our roadmap that will help us respond to these crises.

The Secretary-General has called the SDG Summit the centrepiece of the events and meetings this year.

The HLPF builds political momentum and buy-in from Member States and stakeholders for the SDG Summit. My objective is for the HLPF and the forums and meetings of the Council to contribute to the Summit.

At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, we must take stock of progress. Development progress is threatened by the combined impacts of multiple crises. We were off track even before the pandemic and subsequent crises.

The SDG Summit will sound the alarm bell that in many areas, the world is off target. But it should also be a moment of hope. If we look back, we have come a considerable way since 2015, when countries signed on for an ambitious, aspirational, and universal Agenda.

We have made headways against child and maternal mortality. Digitalization is bringing information and government services to under-served populations. Digital banking applications can help rural populations gain access to larger markets and global information. Renewable energy technologies continue their remarkable growth.

We have seen almost universal uptake of the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF. The UNECE region has been a model for undertaking these important reviews.

In the region, after our July HLPF session, a high number of countries will have undertaken at least one review:

- 15 countries having carried out a review once so far.
- 38 countries twice, and
- Two countries, namely Azerbaijan and Switzerland, have done three reviews.
- This year, the European Union will be the first supranational entity to present a VNR, which will pave the way for other groupings to consider this modality.

These VNRs reports tell us that progress has been made but further efforts must be undertaken to accelerate progress on the SDGs and address gaps in implementation.

Doing so will deliver enormous benefits, across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. But doing so demands deep structural changes and transformative actions. Doing so means breaking away from business-as-usual approaches to development and it requires more and better financing for the SDGs.

Together, we must fight for the SDGs. We must embrace transformation. We must keep the promise of prosperity and solidarity made in 2015. And we must act now.

A successful Summit needs the priorities, commitments, and solutions from the regions. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your discussions at the HLPF in July.

Thank you.