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**NGO Forum – Beijing+20 UNECE Regional Review Meeting**

**3 – 5 November 2014**

**Opening Statement**

**By**

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Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,  
Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure to address this important meeting on behalf of the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

In case you have not noticed, this is gender week in Geneva: with this NGO Forum, the UNECE/UN Women Beijing+20 Regional Review meeting, the WMO Conference on the Gender Dimension of Climate and the CEDAW Committee all taking place this week.

Over the last months, we in UNECE have been closely cooperating with the organizers of this Forum, our sisters from the NGO CSW Geneva, with the objective to make sure that the messages coming from your meeting will be heard by our governments in the regional review meeting; that they will be discussed with them and become an integral part of the conclusions and recommendations which we will convey from our region to the international community at the global level.

The UNECE region – the different parts of Europe, Central Asia and North America - is extremely diverse, and has undergone fundamental political, social and economic transitions over the past 3 decades. The situation of women and girls is equally diverse.

The changes in the region have affected approaches to the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and their enjoyment of human rights.

In preparation for the regional review meeting, and jointly with UN Women, we have asked governments to report on progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and 52 out of our 56 member States have responded.

Their reports show that progress on gender equality has been made since the Beijing Conference, with stronger legal and normative frameworks, and greater rights awareness and readiness to address gender inequality.

However, this progress is uneven, and some parts of the region have experienced stagnation or reversals of previous gains.

Inequalities in the region and within countries are on the rise, social exclusion of marginalized groups remains a persistent reality, and overall implementation of norms, policies and measures remains a big challenge.

The Beijing Conference created a strong momentum, but as the momentum subsided, progress in legislation and implementation slowed down.

We need renewed commitment, more resources, stronger accountability, and overall better implementation.

In many of our member States the achievement of gender equality can hardly be called a priority. This has become particularly obvious in the wake of the recent financial and economic crisis: Measures to counter the crisis have been gender blind, and in some cases funding for national and local gender equality institutions and women's organisations have been lowered or stopped.

On a more positive note, let's not forget that some of the most advanced countries in terms of gender equality can also be found in our region, and we have some good examples to share.

Our analysis of the country reports shows that the main priorities of the last two decades in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in our region remain paramount, and are shared across the various sub-regions: strengthening women's economic empowerment, preventing and eliminating violence against women, and increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

While we need without doubt targeted interventions in these and other areas, we also have to look at the broader picture:

Many of the issues that we will be discussing this week, are not women's issues only, they are societal issues, issues of sustainable development and of universal human rights.

If we talk about a self-determined life for women, equal economic opportunities and choices for women and girls, about women's autonomy in controlling when to have children, or about the sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, there is an underlying question:

Which kind of society do we want to live in? Which are the attitudes, norms and values that should determine our lives, our social interactions, and weave together our societies?

It's about the future we want, for our children and grandchildren, daughters and sons. It's about a transformational vision of a better world for all.

Gender equality needs to be a part of it. As the international community is about to negotiate a new universal development framework, the post-2015 development agenda with sustainable development goals at its core, we need to make sure that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls deeply impregnate this new framework.

This will require a broad consensus, among public and private institutions, civil society, academia, and international organisations. It will not be an easy task, and who else should spearhead efforts at the global level if not the governments, women's organisations and other stakeholders from our region?

This is why it is so important to send strong and convincing messages from our meetings this week to the international community, and to make these messages heard in the global negotiations next year.

Your Forum constitutes an important first step to formulate such messages, and I have no doubt that you will succeed in doing so.

I wish you animated and fruitful discussions, and I wish all of us passion and perseverance on the road to gender equality.

Thank you.