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**STATEMENT ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT BY THE UNECE MINISTERS OF THE
ENVIRONMENT**

submitted by

the Committee on Environmental Policy of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe

through the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials



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**STATEMENT ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BY THE
UNECE MINISTERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Preamble

We, Ministers of the Environment from the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),

Convinced that cooperation on education for sustainable development can help to ensure mutual understanding, strengthen trust between nations and respect for cultural values, develop friendly relations and tolerance between nations, and contribute to peace, security and welfare,

Emphasizing that education, in addition to being a human right, is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and an essential tool for good governance,

Recognizing that environmental education, as it has evolved over many years in our countries, has increasingly addressed the entire range of global issues included in Agenda 21¹ and all major United Nations conferences, and thus represents a core component of education for sustainable development,

Noting that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002) stressed the need to integrate sustainable development into education systems at all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and non-formal education, in order to promote education as a key agent for change,

¹ United Nations, Agenda 21 - Global Programme of Action on Sustainable Development, 1992.

Welcoming United Nations General Assembly resolution 57/254 of 20 December 2002, in which the General Assembly proclaimed the ten-year period beginning on 1 January 2005 the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to develop a draft international implementation scheme for this decade,

Welcoming also the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Education and Environment of Central Asia (Bishkek, 2003) and the subregional report “Status, prospects and ways of environmental education development in Central Asian countries,”²

Convinced that education for sustainable development is a fundamental tool for improving patterns of consumption and production, laying the ground for research and development of technologies that may improve the environment, as well as for enabling people to integrate environmental issues into their perceptions and actions, starting at a young age,

Stressing that education improves the capability of citizens, as well as their motivation, to assess information and participate in decision-making and to take actions consistent, as appropriate, with the UNECE Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters,

Taking into account the goals identified in the Millennium Declaration³ and in Education For All: Meeting our Collective Commitments,⁴

Stressing that the UNECE Regional Ministerial Meeting preparing for the World Summit had called for initiatives in education while agreeing to “improve education systems and the design of learning programmes on sustainable development to increase general understanding of how to implement and promote sustainable development in practice,”⁵

Taking into account international agreements from the Belgrade Charter⁶ and Tbilisi Declaration⁷ to more recent developments such as Agenda 21, Baltic 21E,⁸ the Thessaloniki Declaration⁹ and the Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the EU,¹⁰

Acknowledging that education for sustainable development should consider diverse local, regional and national circumstances and, therefore, encouraging broad cooperation at the international, regional and State levels involving all stakeholders including public authorities, the educational community, non-governmental organizations, business, youth and the media,

Understanding the need to disseminate and promote good practices in education for sustainable development, and to promote networking in this field,

Noting that educators can play an important role in facilitating dialogue between the authorities and civil society,

² Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, 2003.

³ United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2002.

⁴ UNESCO, the Dakar Framework for Action, 2000.

⁵ ECE/AC.22/2001/2, Ministerial Statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, para. 31.

⁶ Belgrade Charter, UNESCO-United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 1975.

⁷ Tbilisi Declaration, UNESCO-UNEP, 1977.

⁸ An Agenda 21 for Education for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region.

⁹ Thessaloniki Declaration, UNESCO, 1997.

¹⁰ The Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Union, 2001-2010.

Recognizing the importance of the following key principles:

- (a) Education for sustainable development is a cross-sectoral issue, encompassing economic, environmental and social dimensions, and demanding a participatory and holistic approach;
- (b) Learners at all levels should be encouraged to use critical thinking and reflection as a prerequisite for concrete action for sustainable development;
- (c) Sustainable development should be addressed by all educational programmes at all levels, including vocational education and continuing education;
- (d) Education is a lifelong process involving formal, non-formal and informal education;
- (e) The overall aim of education for sustainable development is to empower citizens to act for positive environmental change and this implies a process-oriented and participatory approach,

Encouraged by the interest shown both by Governments and by non-governmental organizations during the preparations for the Kiev Conference in strengthening environmental education as a core strand of education for sustainable development,

Stressing the need to reorient environmental education, together with other fields of education, towards sustainable development,

Considering our role in the promotion of education for sustainable development,

1. Recognize that it is important and timely to develop and finalize a UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development;
2. Invite our Governments to take part in the further work to develop and finalize the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development, to initiate and foster State processes, to establish State focal points and to report on State progress to UNECE;
3. Invite the different bodies responsible for education in UNECE member States to consider the attached basic elements, as appropriate, in preparing relevant strategies, legislation as appropriate and decisions on the local, State and regional levels, considering the widely varying situations not only between countries, but also within the countries of the region;
4. Emphasize that education for sustainable development is an investment in our future, and that each country should ensure that appropriate resources are made available for its development; for this purpose Governments may wish to develop economic instruments. We understand that many countries, particularly countries in transition, may need donor support to carry out the activities;
5. Acknowledge that UNESCO is the lead agency and coordinator with regard to education for sustainable development at the global level;

6. Recognize the important role of the regional commissions as laid out in the Johannesburg Summit's Plan of Implementation, note that the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session (April-May 2003) invited the United Nations regional commissions to consider organizing regional implementation meetings in collaboration with other regional and subregional organizations, as appropriate, in order to contribute to its work and to advance the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and also note that the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session identified education as a cross-cutting issue that it should address in every cycle;¹¹
7. Invite UNECE to work in accordance with its mandate, with UNESCO and the Council of Europe on a regional strategy for education for sustainable development, in dialogue with all relevant international actors, including NGOs and major groups contributing to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development led by UNESCO;
8. Invite bilateral and multilateral donors to support the process.

¹¹ The Implementation Track for Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation: Future Programme, Organization and Methods of Work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, 14 May 2003.