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Opening Statement

by

Ms. Tatiana Molcean

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

Opening of

Eighty-sixth session of the Inland Transport Committee

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 86th session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) in the presence of Ministers, heads of international organizations and other transport leaders from around the world. You are here to debate and decide on matters that will have a profound impact **on inland transport and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular on climate change, but not only.**

This year, the plenary session of ITC will benefit from the combined wisdom of Ministers and deputy Ministers from several regions around the world, alongside more than 300 participants from some 70 countries and leaders of key transport organizations! Looking at the global leaders present here today, I cannot help but think that **the momentum is genuine and strong.** But the challenges are formidable as well.

Under normal circumstance, I would have started my speech in a more traditional way. But I read this week that Earth has now endured, **for the first time**, 12 months of temperatures 1.5C hotter than the pre-industrial era. 2023 shattered climate records, accompanied by extreme weather which left a trail of devastation and despair.

In 2024 we stand at a crossroad for the future of the planet and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with transport and mobility playing a critical role for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Multiple crises have challenged our international system in 2023, straining national and international institutions and placing pressing questions on the top-priority agendas of world leaders.

This year's annual session is geared to contribute to the global debate, and help build consensus on the important role of the transport sector in SDG implementation. This year's High-level Segment is dedicated to "**Taking ambitious climate action – Moving towards decarbonised inland transport by 2050**", one of the most formidable challenges the global community is facing today and one where our cutting-edge work has a very big and positive impact worldwide. **But we must do better and can do better. This year's meeting, with your support, will help achieve that in a very decisive way!**

You have all heard before that CO₂ emitted from the transport sector accounts for 23 per cent of global energy-related CO₂ emissions. Further, within the transport sector, 72 per

cent of CO₂ emissions are from inland transport, including about 69 per cent from the road subsector alone.

Allow me to focus on two aspects of this sobering fact.

The first is that the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) can help in ways no other UN body can. One of the decisions you will consider during this week caught my attention for its ambition and importance: the adoption of the ITC Strategy for reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from inland transport, based on the United Nations legal instruments under the Committee's purview. The Strategy is supported by a **strong action plan with milestones**. I have seen many initiatives on climate change as Executive Secretary and before, including from IMO and ICAO. I can say with absolute certainty that the ITC Strategy is timely, carries immense potential and is profoundly needed. I wish you every success. We will hear later today also the perspective from UNFCCC, so I am very much looking forward to a fruitful partnership for many years to come.

The second is the importance of partnerships – indeed one of our Ministerial panels today is about partnering for common solutions. This year's plenary includes multiple key actors that can help immensely on that front. Member States who are at the cutting edge of technologies that can help transition to a low-emission or even net-zero inland transport. Also, Member States for whom Climate Change poses a very real existential threat - not in the near future, but today! Transport leaders from multilateral development banks, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector will also contribute their wisdom. I have repeatedly stated that existential challenges of this scale and magnitude can only be tackled through strong partnerships – and here we have a partnership forming of the highest order! I am really interested to see the outcome of this debate and, why not, a formidable alliance emerging from it.

The ITC is a unique inter-governmental body specialized in inland transport (road, rail, inland water and intermodal transport). As custodian to 61 legal instruments and with 152 UN Member States as contracting parties to its conventions- **a number that grows every year!** - it is also the centre of UN inland transport conventions and agreements. The two latest legal instruments promote transport of people and goods **by rail, one of the green modes of transport**. How relevant and symbolic to this year's discussions!

I look forward to listening to the exciting presentations and debate, which will surely help us to capitalize on the traditional strengths of ITC. I expect that it will also identify new opportunities to contribute to SDG implementation, especially leveraging automation as a means of enhancing safety, connectivity and access.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Committee is indeed a UN centre for inland transport with excellent, concrete achievements. Tomorrow, a session restricted to governments will discuss how to better position the ITC and increase its usefulness and impact in the region and the world, in order to support SDG implementation. And I very much welcome the participation in this discussion of *all* our member States.

I am confident that you will take important messages back home, and you will be inspired to promote the necessary changes in the transport sector, especially as a result of this policy session.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for having come to Geneva to attend this session. I also thank our generous sponsors, the Swiss Federal Roads Office and the Government of the Netherlands – our host and chairing country! – as well as CITA and DEKRA for their generous support.

I wish you every success in your work, and I thank you for your attention.
