Speech of Ms. Ekaterine Grigalava, Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia

At the 9th World Environmental Education Congress

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Vancouver, Canada.

Your Excellences,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor and great pleasure to participate in the 9th World Environmental Education Congress in Vancouver which represents one of the most important international events in the field of environmental education.

First of all, I would like to express sincere appreciation to the organizers of the conference for consolidating their efforts to conduct this event that is very unique and remarkable. Let me also extend my gratitude and wholehearted respect to the Government of Canada for warm welcome and the exceptional hospitality in this beautiful and green city of Vancouver.

I am even more honored and proud of having the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Government of Georgia at the event dedicated to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Tbilisi Conference on Education for Sustainable Development held in 1977 in the Capital City of Georgia. It was pleasure to see the video from “Tbilisi+35” about the conference of 1977.

Today the most challenging question we face is how to sustain the future. And we have the answer: the best way to ensure a better, healthier planet is to equip individuals, communities and governments with the knowledge and skills to meet tomorrow’s environmental challenges and help them to make informed choices. In this regard, education for sustainable development is considered as a prerequisite to protect our environment through raising environmental awareness, acquiring basic knowledge and developing environmentally sound behavior of the world's population. Therefore, it is important to mobilize the world's educational resources to help creating a more sustainable future.

40 years ago the first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education was held in Tbilisi, Georgia where the countries stood together to shape and adopt a historical document - Tbilisi Declaration. This document has proved to be one of the most important documents in the field of environmental education which reflects the fundamental principles of sustainable development established all over the world. It has played a crucial role in introduction of environmental education in the general educational system worldwide. In September 2012, following the Rio+20 - the UN Conference on Sustainable Development - the countries have gathered in Tbilisi once again in order to discuss the past achievements and define future pathways for sustainable education. The main objectives of Tbilisi+35 are reflected in Tbilisi Communiqué - “Educate Today for a Sustainable Future”, adopted at the Conference.
Following the Conference, Georgia has taken further actions to realize its aspirations towards developing in a sustainable way through promoting the formation of a responsible society. Recognizing the importance of environmental education in achieving the above mentioned goal, the Government of Georgia adopted “Environmental Education for Sustainable Development Georgian National Strategy and Action Plan” (2012 – 2014) in 2012 and started development of ESD Strategy and Action Plan for 2018-2022. These documents serve as an important foundation for empowering all citizens with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to live in a sustainable way and foster environmentally responsible changes in society. Furthermore, as a practical tool to scale up ESD throughout the country, a separate unit was established under the Ministry with the aim to support environmental education in Georgia through coordination and implementation of the respective activities, including study courses and master programme. Despite the important achievements in the field at the national level we fully recognize the need of stronger international cooperation for the success of activities in the field of ESD. In this context, Georgia in cooperation with Mongolia prepared a “Resolution on Investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training” that was adopted at the UNEA in 2016. This Resolution takes note of the Tbilisi Declaration and the Tbilisi Communique and invites the countries and other relevant stakeholders to support the work of the UNEP in enhancing environmental education.

I would like to highlight the considerable progress towards ESD within the framework of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) led by UNESCO, aiming to mobilize the educational resources in order to create a more sustainable future and advance education for environment and sustainability. During those 10 years the Governments have integrated education strategies, tools and targets into their national policies and priorities. Furthermore, number of initiatives have been launched by UNECE in order to integrate ESD into formal, non-formal and informal education. In this regard I am proud to refer to the most recent and remarkable initiative in this field -“Statement on Education for Sustainable Development” - adopted by education and environment Ministries of UNECE region at the Eighth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference held in Batumi, Georgia in June 2016. This is an important framework recognizing ESD as an efficient tool for achieving SDGs.

To sum up, it is obvious that Sustainable Development demands actions from all actors of society. The role of the governments is crucial in developing an effective policy, however, at the same time it is important to empower societies with knowledge, skills, values and awareness to achieve sustainability at national and global levels. I express confidence that this conference is another important step towards promoting a global development agenda and encouraging environmentally responsible changes worldwide.

With this spirit, let me once again thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to participate in this historically important event. I believe, that with joint efforts we will develop an effective policy to respond to the existing and emerging environmental challenges
by means of education and accomplish significant progress in achieving our common goals towards sustainable future.

Thank you for your attention and wish you every success with the Conference.