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STATEMENT BY MR. KLAUS A. SAHLGREN, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC
COMMISSION FOR EUROPE, TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ACIDIFICATION
AND ITS POLICY IMPLICATIONS (AMSTERDAM, 5 MAY 1986)

Mr. Minister, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you at this opening session of the International Conference on Acidification and its Policy Implications, organized by the Government of The Netherlands in co-operation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

We all appreciate the initiative taken by The Netherlands, and your personal interest, Mr. Minister, in this important event. Moreover, allow me to thank you for your thoughtful and stimulating opening address. The Government of The Netherlands has traditionally played a very active role in the promotion and implementation of international action against air pollution - through global, regional and bilateral programmes - and especially in its strong support for ECE environmental programmes and the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. This Conference comes at a critical time, when policy guidance based on sound scientific evidence is in great demand.

Acidification is a central environmental problem for our region - a region which comprises all of Europe and North America. We have begun to realize that it not only affects our material well-being and the natural resources on which we depend - soil, forests, freshwaters and their living resources - but even our cultural heritage, as we see our historical buildings and monuments crumbling away under the silent force of atmospheric pollutants.

Let me give you a brief run-down on where we stand with respect to air pollution activities. The 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, which entered into force in 1983 and for which we provide the secretariat, has been ratified by 31 of the 35 Signatories, and the 32nd ratification is now underway. The 1984 Protocol on the long-term financing of EMEP has been ratified by 13 of its 22 Signatories; and the Protocol adopted in July in Helsinki on the reduction of sulphur emissions of their transboundary fluxes by at least 30 per cent has been ratified by 5 of its

21 Signatories so far. Both protocols therefore still need more ratifications to come into effect. At the forty-first session of the Economic Commission for Europe, held last month in Geneva, many delegations cited the 1985 Helsinki protocol, in particular, as being a significant achievement in international environmental co-operation, and expressed the hope that further Parties to the Convention would ratify it or accede to it.

Governments need not wait for the entry into force of these protocols, however, in order to take implementing action at the national level or to go even further than the protocols require. Ten of the signatories of the Helsinki protocol have already stated their willingness to reduce emissions beyond the 30 per cent target; and several countries have indicated plans to accelerate the time-plan envisaged by the protocol.

Pending the entry into force of the protocol for the long-term financing of the EMEP monitoring programme, EMEP is funded by voluntary contributions from the Parties to the Convention. Currently data on air and precipitation quality from 96 stations in 24 countries are reported to EMEP. For example, this year the Executive Body will receive information on annual transboundary fluxes and deposition of sulphur compounds over Europe for the years 1980 and 1983. It should be emphasized that the voluntary financial contributions for EMEP received so far have been sufficient only to cover the basic requirements of the agreed work plan, and a considerably higher level of funding would be needed to carry out the full programme. Since EMEP is expected also to play an important role in the implementation of the Helsinki protocol it will be crucial to keep the measurement activity and the model calculations carried out under this programme at a high standard in the coming years.

Besides the EMEP programme (with its international centres located in Norway and the USSR), three further international co-operative programmes for monitoring assessment of air pollution effects, under the auspices of the Executive Body for the Convention, have been launched within the past six months:

- Air pollution effects on forests are being monitored and assessed, with initial funding from the United Nations Environment Programme, and with the Federal Republic of Germany as lead country; the Federal Research Centre for Forestry and Forest Products in Hamburg and the Czechoslovak

Centre for the Environment in Bratislava serving as programme co-ordinating centres.

- Acidification of rivers and lakes is being assessed under the leadership of Canada, with the active participation of the USSR, and with the Norwegian Institute for Water Research in Oslo providing the programme centre.
- Effects on materials, including historic and cultural monuments, are studied under a programme led by the Swedish Corrosion Institute in Stockholm as the main research centre, and four subcentres located in Czechoslovakia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

Initial progress on these three government-sponsored programmes has been most gratifying. It illustrates the kind of "multiplier effect" which the Convention has triggered in international efforts to deal with the acid rain problem. While the number of countries who have joined these programmes on a voluntary basis is growing, there should be even wider participation.

The initial focus has been on sulphur dioxide emissions; now serious attention is being given also to nitrogen oxides. Nitrogen compounds are known to account for about one third of the deposition load connected with acidification, and are also a key factor in the formation of ozone and other photo-oxidants. Following the establishment of a Working Group on Nitrogen Oxides by the Executive Body for the Convention in July 1985, a substantial amount of information has been assembled by government experts and by consultants; I particularly wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Government of The Netherlands in this respect.

The "Saas-Fee Declaration" adopted in February 1986 and endorsed by 11 Governments, further highlighted the problem of air pollution from nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons. On the basis of proposals to be made by the Working Group, it is expected that the Executive Body at its fourth session in November this year, will be in a position to take concrete measures aiming at the efficient control of nitrogen oxides.

Measures for dealing with transboundary air pollution have far-reaching economic as well as technical implications. As is the case in dealing with technical problems, such as acidification, concerted action can result in greater economy and efficiency. It would seem to be more economical to

undertake joint pollution control programmes rather than national programmes alone.

The ongoing programmes for implementation of the Convention have already resulted in a lively exchange of technological information and know-how, which is beginning to have its spin-off in commercial terms, especially in the field of East-West trade relations. With the gradual tightening of emission standards in all ECE countries, the search is now on for the most cost-effective methods on pollution control - thereby encouraging the export of specialized equipment and foreign licensing of new techniques.

Next week we shall hold in Graz - at the kind invitation of the Austrian Government - the fourth ECE Seminar on the Control of Sulphur and Nitrogen Oxides from Stationary Sources. The response from industry, in particular, has been impressive. With about 200 participants and more than 90 papers already registered, these seminars are rapidly turning into a high-level market-place for technological innovations, where many business companies look both for trade opportunities and for early information on the trend of future governmental regulation.

Air pollution control technology will also be included among the subjects of the forthcoming ECE Symposium on East-West Business Opportunities and Trade Prospects, to be held in Thessaloniki (Greece) in September 1986. After all, the more we can mobilize market forces to achieve our common environmental objectives, the less coercion we need to apply through governmental intervention.

Obviously, governmental policies on standards will continue to play the predominant role in this field. This is clearly illustrated by the major review of national strategies and policies for air pollution control, which is currently underway, and the results of which will be presented to the next meeting of the Executive Body in November this year. However, when it comes to translating governmental policies and standards into actual pollution abatement measures, we must ensure the active involvement of the industries primarily concerned, namely fossil-fuel power plants and the manufacturers of motor vehicles. A dialogue should be maintained with these industrial sectors, as the major targets of pollution controls under the Convention and its protocols, both with respect to formulating regulations and their effective implementation.

The participation of other international organizations, especially UNEP, WMO and WHO is also of critical importance. They provide substantial financial and technical support to the work programme carried out under the Convention. It is gratifying to note the keen interest of several non-governmental organizations as well in this work, and the very useful contacts which are thus maintained in areas of common concern.

The phenomenon of acidification and long-range air pollution has, of course, ceased to be confined to the ECE region alone. Acid deposition has been found downwind of the Zambian copperbelt, and in soil samples in the state of Sao Paulo in Brazil. Forests in Thailand and the Taj Mahal in India are reported to be threatened by air pollution.

The countries of our region - after pioneering, so to speak, the mass production and long-range export of acid rain - could also show the way towards effective international policies for its control in other regions. This Conference can make a significant contribution in this regard.

This International Conference is being convened at a most propitious time, when further impetus should be given to programmes concerned with acidification and its policy implications. The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution provides - as you just said Mr. Minister - the framework in which action can be taken. The ECE will continue to play its vital role in the implementation of the Convention.

Mr. Minister, Distinguished Delegates,

May I extend my very best wishes for the success of this important Conference, and mark the intense interest which the ECE will take in its deliberations and conclusions.