Halfway there, but nowhere near...
Need for genuine actions towards inclusive transformation

“Regional perspective for the UNECE region on the shrinking space for civil society”
Marianne Haslegrave, Commonwealth Medical Trust and ECE RCEM

President of ECOSOC, Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, and friends,

The Secretary-General’s Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 states that “a global alliance for SDG action” (para 8) including civil society, science and young people, is needed in order to put the world on a better path, and to deliver for people and planet. It also calls for the strengthening of parliament and civil society engagement, as a key priority, in SDG monitoring, follow up, and review. (para 58)

The European region, stretching from the Caucuses to the Canadian Pacific coast, has a vibrant and active civil society, while including most of the donor countries and major foundations.

The ECE Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism is closely involved in the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, and, most recently, has been in dialogue with the co-chairs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Switzerland.

However,
• While a global concern, the ‘Shrinking space for civil society’, already referred to, is particularly prevalent in the European region.
• Organizations were already experiencing the effects of shrinking space, before the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated the situation with face-to-face meetings no longer being possible. And, it has taken longer for organizations to return to meetings, such as this one, affecting our role in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
In the European region, moreover, CSOs have also witnessed a back-sliding on issues such as gender, and sexual and gender-based violence, which had increased during COVID-19.
• Post-pandemic, the financial, economic and environmental and climate change crises; the rise of populist governments; movements of people; and the war in Ukraine have also impacted negatively. While affecting the living standards for the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in the region, it has also meant that financial and other overseas development aid for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the furthest behind developing countries has greatly diminished.

In looking towards the SDG Summit this September, we appeal to Member States, the UN system and others in the European, and all other regions, to ensure the restoration of civil society space, coupled with the availability of adequate funding for CSOs. This will enable us to contribute fully to a global alliance for SDG action, as called for in the UN Secretary-General’s Report.

Thank you