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**Follow-up Forum on Trade Facilitation on 14-15 May 2003
(Concept paper)**

The practical usefulness of an open and neutral platform where stakeholders can meet and exchange views on policies and priorities for further action to facilitate trade around the globe was clearly demonstrated at the International Forum on Trade Facilitation, on 29-30 May 2002 (organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE, in collaboration with a number of other international organizations). The positive response to this UNECE initiative prompted Ambassador Wasescha, Delegate of the Swiss Government for Trade Agreements and Chairman of the closing session of the Forum in May 2002 to suggest holding a follow up event in May 2003, closer to the fifth WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, Mexico, where important decisions on the future of trade facilitation will be taken. The intergovernmental bodies under the UNECE welcomed this suggestion and asked the UNECE Trade Division to prepare a follow-up International Forum on Trade Facilitation for May 2003.

The circle of partner organizations for the preparation of the 2003 Forum has been enlarged and includes: the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN regional commissions, the United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Customs Organization (WCO), the European Commission (EC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), regional development banks and trade development organizations, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) as UNECE's key interlocutor in the business community, and a number of other international and non-governmental organizations. Direct participation and input by the Governments of countries from all over the world will again be an essential element in the organization of the Forum. In 2003, the UNECE also will continue to rely on Governments of industrialized countries to finance participants to the Forum from the developing and transition economy countries. The UNECE would like to thank the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and the Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie for their support in making the Forum in 2002 a success, and hopes that they will continue this valuable support for 2003. A number of private institutions, which supported the Forum in May 2002, will be invited to collaborate again in 2003.

We would like to design a programme which will give adequate time for open discussion at the Forum. Therefore, it is proposed that there will be a small number of speakers in each session, and there will be parallel sessions during part of the Forum.

The opening plenary session on the morning of 14 May 2003 will bring together high-level representatives from Governments and the co-organizing institutions to address the major issues on the way to build consensus and practical progress in the

achievement of trade facilitation. In the afternoon of that day there will be two parallel sessions: one of them will address the policy implications of trade facilitation and the second will look at the latest technical developments in the field, including the harmonization of technical standards. The morning of 15 May 2003 will concentrate on the possibilities and limits for the private provision of the essential services infrastructure, which is needed to make trade facilitation possible, and on the existing and potential input of the business community, in order to comply with the request from many Governments that the UNECE even more actively involves the business community even more actively in the planning and organization of the Forum in 2003. This session will be organized together with the International Chamber of Commerce.

The afternoon of 15 May 2003 will be dedicated to the link between regional and global work on trade facilitation, in the form of "open regionalism". The session will start with a Round Table on the facilitation of trade and transport services within the regional perspective under the UNECE Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED). It will be followed by a broader discussion involving all UN regional commissions, regional development banks and trade promotion organizations. At the end of the afternoon of 15 May 2003, the Chairman of the closing plenary session will present the conclusions from the Forum. These conclusions will further address some of the key ideas for future practical work in trade facilitation, and will provide an input into the preparations for the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun later in the year. In addition, during the Forum, the UNECE plans to organize, in collaboration with the other international organizations and with the business community, a small exhibit of practical tools for trade facilitation.

Key speakers will include Ministers and Vice-Ministers of trade or finance, the Director-General of WTO, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce and other organizations, such as the WCO, decision-makers from Governments and industry. The Forum will aim at a balanced representation of all regions in the world, bringing together a wide range of organizations and businesses.

Forum participants are also invited to attend the plenary sessions of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED), on Tuesday and Friday (13 and 16 May 2003), and of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) on Monday (12-13 May 2003).

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