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**PRESS RELEASE****Start of Work of 61st Session of UN Economic Commission for Europe**

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The Sixty-first Session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), incorporating 55 member states, opened in Geneva on February 21. It is dedicated to urgent questions of the reform of this essentially sole universal body for economic cooperation in Europe. The session will consider ways for enhancing the operational effectiveness of, and adapting the Commission to the new political realities and challenges in Europe. Particular attention will be paid to bringing the program activity of the Commission into conformity with the requirements of member countries, improving its management system, and conjugating its work with the UN global development goals and with regional cooperation priorities in Europe.

The leader of the Russian delegation, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Yakovenko, spoke on the opening day of the session within the framework of its high-level segment on policy issues. He gave a comprehensive analysis of the UNECE reform program, outlined Russia's priorities in this process and called upon the Commission to vigorously assist the overcoming of the existing dividing lines in Europe and the formation of the common European economic space.

During the session, member countries will also consider a UNECE Strategic Framework 2008-2009, the questions of technical assistance to the CIS states and other countries with an economy in transition, and problems facing the region in the area of sustainable development and the utilization of information and communication technologies.

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