

Building Forward Better - Action is Urgently Needed

**Joint Global Statement from Major Groups and other Stakeholders
for Consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its Fifth Session**
based on consultations as part of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum,
9-11 February 2021

Preamble – The time to act at global level is now

There is **overwhelming scientific proof that the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are an existential threat for Nature, animals and humankind.** At the global level, the COVID-19 pandemic is the worst social, environmental and economic crisis of our lifetimes. Outbreaks of zoonotic diseases have increasingly been recognised as the results of current unsustainable production and consumption patterns and humankind's vulnerable relationship with Nature and animals, and they require us all to urgently transform our food systems.¹

The **pandemic is a wakeup call to speed up global environmental decision-making,** to step up ambition and to increase the pace and scale of implementation efforts. We need to learn from the experience of the pandemic and invest in the safe, sustainable management of natural resources, conservation and restoration of ecosystems. It is critical that all governments take **courageous and transformative decisions and actions now,** based on foresight and precaution, in line with scientific evidence and human rights. We call on you to effectively tackle root causes and drivers of current devastation. We demand the global recognition of a **human right to a healthy environment.** 50 years after the Stockholm Conference and almost 30 years after the Rio Earth Summit, progress is too weak and synergies between environmental agreements inadequate. We lack accountability and enforcement mechanisms. This needs to change now.

The **current economic system is destructive for all people, the environment, animals and the whole planet.** The constant expansion of large-scale projects such as plantations, monocultures and cattle rearing to more and more extraction is driving this destruction. We are calling for a just transition to climate-neutral, pollution-free and equitable societies and economies that thrive within the planet's ecological boundaries. Existing economic and development paradigms need to be rethought **prioritising the wellbeing of people, animals and Nature over infinite economic growth** as measured in GDP and the redistribution of wealth. Stricter regulation of the market and **legally binding frameworks including real penalties are necessary to hold business accountable.** Member States and UNEP must protect the public good and promote alternative and ethical economic systems.

Decisions and the implementation thereof must **involve all relevant rights holders,** in particular marginalised and targeted persons, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities,

¹ UN Environment Preventing the next pandemic. Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission, 20 July 2020.

people under occupation, in war zones and armed conflict, refugees, women, youth and older people. Groups already marginalised are extremely vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change, as well as pandemic impacts. We must end the exclusion of rights holders from environmental decision-making.

We recall the **need for good and equitable governance** based on ethics, trust, transparency and accountability, access to information and public participation, inclusiveness and access to justice, the respect for human rights, including environmental rights, and the rule of law. We call on you to **foster partnership with the Major Groups and Stakeholders as well as other rights holders**, and to ensure a safe, open, inclusive and meaningful space for civil society to contribute to the UNEA process, in particular for less powerful MGS. The ‘new reality’ of the pandemic means moving towards online processes. All rights holders, in particular stakeholders from the Global South, need to be considered ensuring **accessibility of virtual meetings and documentation** in all UN languages. We exercise our engagement with limited resources, and we **need you to step up your support from words to deeds by providing resources**. We acknowledge the efforts made to open up spaces for young people, but we call on you to **answer with actions the concerns of future generations**. We need your constant investment in formal, non-formal and informal **education for sustainable development** to empower stakeholders in decision-making.

We call for a **new approach to decision-making at international level fit for purpose to respond to the current crises**. We need to focus international processes to engage all stakeholders in a meaningful analysis, planning actions and taking decisions. We need to cut red tape for endless protocol and formalities refocusing on the delivery of results, transparency and accountability.

Main messages for UNEA 5.1

The theme of UNEA 5 is the **international community’s opportunity to recognize and cherish the functions and services that ecosystems** have; and, independent from our human needs, that **Nature has intrinsic value and rights**. UNEA 5 must focus on the equitable conservation of biodiversity, on the sustainable and limited use of its components and on **fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from natural resources** and associated traditional knowledge, innovation, practices and technologies of Indigenous Peoples or local communities. We call on you to **hold to account those governments and companies that deteriorate and pollute ecosystems** while offering **strong protection for those people, youth and children at the frontline**, our environmental defenders, who are threatened and killed when calling out harmful business practices. We call on you to make sure that the **UNEA 5 process results in rethinking and implementing our notion of development** to one that is in harmony with Nature and animals ensuring we leave no one behind. **Human and environmental rights and a healthy planet are mutually dependent**.

UN Environment Medium-Term Strategy, Programme of Work and budget

We call on you to ensure that the MTS (and the Programme of Work):

- explicitly includes **social sciences, respect for multilingualism and diverse systems of knowledge** including indigenous, traditional and local knowledge and innovations that evolve from the practical experiences of communities, women and across generations; promotes

women and girls in sciences; involves civil society, grassroots movements and communities in technology foresight and horizon scanning and in the evaluation of potential impacts of new and emerging technologies; builds much more on **citizen science and community-owned research, and develops global projects to demonstrate best practice**; steps up its engagement with **young people**; allocates **resources to work directly with civil society** in environmental protection and education programmes.

- recognises and works towards the **elimination of racism and discrimination** in all UNEP programs and activities; recognises environmental racism as one dimension of racism;
- **recognises the rights of Indigenous Peoples, mainstreams the role of Indigenous Peoples as environmental governors** into a revised MTS and environmental governance structure of UNEP; promotes the right to **Free Prior Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples**; supports the **security of tenure systems to protect traditional and Indigenous Peoples** from violence, criminalisation and eviction, and provides research on the ecological impacts of forced relocations for discussion at UNEA;
- recognizes the need for **developed countries, given their climate debt**, to continue taking the lead in emission reductions and in helping developing countries with the provision of new and additional finance for climate action, technology transfer, and capacity building;
- provides a stronger message on the link between ecosystem destruction, zoonotic disease outbreaks and **environmental factors behind the COVID-19 pandemic**, its enormous impacts on every dimension of the SDGs and the threat of potential devastation from future pandemics; incorporates the **One Health-One Welfare** approach; replaces “building back better” by “building forward better”.
- finally **incorporates animal health and welfare** in UNEP policymaking and programmes;
- gives more attention to **sustainable food systems and food sovereignty**; addresses food losses and waste; recognizes the impacts of unsustainable food production, processing, packaging distribution and consumption on its three pillars; gives priority to sustainable models such as agroecology, prevents further corporatization of agriculture and the transfer of land, water, forest, seeds and other commons from communities to corporate control;
- works towards the elimination of hazards of **chemicals, including endocrine disrupting chemicals, pesticides and radioactive pollution** and their impacts on sustainability, environment, health, biodiversity, and climate; supports the development of a global, legal mechanism to **phase out highly hazardous pesticides to eliminate them by 2030**.
- contains clear **targets to ensure that the effectiveness of the proposed mainstreaming of UNEP’s disasters and conflicts work can be properly monitored and scrutinised** by Member States and other stakeholders and provides **leadership in addressing the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts, military activities, war refugees and occupation**, and the harm this causes to people and their livelihoods, to water and food resources, to animals, vegetation and whole ecosystems.
- **reviews UNEP’s Partnership Strategy** to ensure equal access to information and participation at early stage for all stakeholders; prevents any conflict of interest stemming from corporate funding; does not enter into partnerships with companies that lack a measurable transformation pathway to zero-pollution and addressing climate change; ensures full transparency regarding its funding sources.
- **reintroduces actions for environmental defenders** in a time when defenders are more than ever threatened, attacked and killed; works with governments to protect defenders and bring offenders to justice; reinforces existing mechanisms such as under the Escazú Agreement and

the Aarhus Convention; supports the development of legal frameworks for the protection of environmental defenders in other regions.

- enhances **recognition of multilevel collaboration** and a more holistic vision to mobilize contributions of towns, cities, and regions, to national and global efforts on the environment through all types of subnational governments; works with member states to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities and environment ministries to effectively enforce environmental rules and regulation.

Stockholm +50 – waiting for short text from Consultation

The Stockholm plus 50 Conference, to be organised 1-3 June 2022, will be a momentous occasion to celebrate the Legacy of the 1972 Stockholm Conference which established UNEP and began to address global, regional and national environmental problems, challenges and policies. It will also be a **serious occasion to agree on decisions to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Multilateral Environmental Agreements, as well as to boost the development of future international instruments**, such as the legally binding agreement to tackle plastic pollution.

The principles emerging from the Stockholm Conference are still not integrated in accountable ways throughout all agreements. The proposed Act for Nature has the potential that the **Stockholm +50 conference** ensures that principles and rights that have emerged under environmental law globally and that are enshrined in constitutions and laws in many of your countries are fully and globally recognised. This includes the international codification of a **human right to a healthy environment**, the **recognition of ecocide as an international crime**, the **protection of environmental defenders**, and the **rights of animals and the rights of Nature** in the context of global health and issues of zoonotic pandemics.

UNEP must be strengthened and upgraded to a Specialized UN Agency, with adequate resources, human, legal and financial. This is a normal continuation of the evolution from a UNEP as a subsidiary body under ECOSOC to an independent authoritative body as the leading global environmental organisation.

The Stockholm + 50 conference is the international community's opportunity to agree to these elements, include them in a **final future looking/visionary, action-oriented statement** and request UNEP and UNEA with the support of adequate resources to further expand on these issues with a view to implement them including with the political support of the UN General Assembly to make this possible.

UNEP@50 and the UNEP We Want

The year 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the UN Environment Programme at Stockholm during the UN Conference on the Human Environment. We welcome UNEP's engagement with civil society in the UNEP@50 process, based upon Decision 4/2 at UNEA 4. At the same time, Major Groups and Stakeholders have embarked upon our own commemorative process leading towards a **report on "The UNEP We Want"** to be presented at

UNEA 5.2. The results of our Snapshot Survey show deep appreciation for UNEP's past achievements as well as great expectations for an enhanced role for UNEP in the future.

Resolution 73/333

Environmental law and governance suffer from substantial gaps, weak implementation and enforcement. We call on you to re-engage in the urgent discussion to close these gaps as identified, amongst others, in the UN Secretary-General's report. Resolution 73/333 requires a political declaration for February 2021. We call for a **political declaration that commits Members States to work on a concrete Action Plan to be achieved by 2025.** This must include objectives, targets, a timeline and indicators, including legal indicators to assess the effective implementation and enforcement of environmental law, legal targets for the International Court, and, very importantly, means of implementation including funding and capacity building. We also call on you to develop and operationalise a **robust and transparent monitoring, impact-evaluation mechanisms and learning mechanism for UNEA** to track progress on the agreed decisions at the local, regional and national levels and document best practices. We call on you to make full use of the commemoration of the adoption of Fifth Montevideo Programme as mentioned in 73/333 by proclaiming a **Day of Action for the Implementation of Environmental Law** involving people at the local, regional, national and international level, using all means of outreach. We suggest building up UNEPs computer portal to help locate and show ways of closing the gaps between MEAs, linking to Voluntary National Reviews and best practices.

From UNEA 5.1 to UNEA 5.2 - stepping up the momentum

Responding to COVID19: Building forward better

Covid-19 was not only predictable, but the pandemic has revealed the **illness of our current economic and social systems.** UNEP has underlined that the way in which people source, grow, trade and consume food and animals is a major driver for the outbreak of zoonotic diseases, and this underlines the need to transform our food systems. We call on you to proactively use the One Health-One Welfare approach.

We call on you to ensure that the **recovery will not bail out those companies who have contributed to biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution** or that involve future pandemic risk. We call on you to apply **strict conditionalities** and to **remove any subsidies** for those stakeholders contributing to the triple environmental crises. You must ensure that recovery measures employ **accountability measures** that ensure those accessing subsidies demonstrate resource efficiency and sufficiency, emission reduction in line with UNFCCC, a zero-pollution pathway, alignment with the post2020 global biodiversity framework, and respect for local communities.

We call on you to **build forward better** and to ensure **recovery programmes and investments are guided by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.** Environmental concerns and the prevention of future pandemics must be mainstreamed across all instruments for recovery while ensuring Just Transition policies and measures, including social protection and protection of human and labour rights. We call on you to focus on investing in adaptation, regeneration and restoration of

ecosystems and the implementation of environmental law, the energy transition and climate resilience, zero-waste and zero-pollution solutions, and alternative economic models in support of Indigenous Peoples, ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women and girls, informal and unpaid workers and climate frontline communities, prioritising support for local livelihoods, short and resilient supply chains and gender just development alternatives. We call on you to invest in research on environmental health both in medical schools and in environmental and planning sciences. **Invest in positive change!**

Beat plastic pollution now!

We need global action to curb plastic pollution now through coordinating and reinforcing existing agreements, and through a new global agreement. The pandemic has resulted in a further acceleration of plastic pollution. We strongly support the process on Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/Res.6). We call on you to maintain the momentum towards UNEA 5.2 to **adopt a mandate to start negotiations for a legally binding instrument to tackle plastic pollution**. The negotiations need to **include those communities most impacted** by plastic pollution along its life cycle, including communities affected by pollution from extraction and production, the petrochemical industry, landfills and incinerators, informal waste pickers and those communities depending on ocean resources.

This instrument needs to adopt a **life cycle approach covering the phase-out and reduction of plastic up-stream and middle-stream** through better product design, including support for small scale innovations, to avoid toxic additives and prevent waste, ensure a global clean-up and the remediation of polluted sites, address the health and climate impacts of plastic pollution and ensure the **polluter pays principle**. We must be able to hold plastic manufacturers accountable for knowingly and willingly placing products on the market that create negative health and environmental impacts for centuries. Focus must be put on reduction and prevention, instead of relying on recycling alone. We call on you to **avoid false solutions as well as false sustainability claims** and remain vigilant to the attempts of fossil fuel companies striving to make up for the drop in oil consumption by boosting plastic production. The new instrument needs to ensure best possible coordination between existing regional and international instruments and technology transfer, research on alternatives and adequate financing to enable all countries to implement it.

Showcasing Nature's role in supporting human security, post-conflict recovery and in conflict transformation

UNEP and UNEA must provide **leadership in addressing the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts, occupation and military activities**, and the harm they cause to people's livelihood, health and access to food and water, air and water quality, fauna and flora, and ecosystems. There is growing momentum towards a coherent environment, peace and security agenda across the UN system, which could mainstream policies to address the environment before, during and after armed conflicts, and in situations of occupation. This includes the role of good environmental governance and accountability of occupying forces and war powers in reducing environmental and climate security risks, and support for environmental human rights and for those who defend them.

UNEA-5.2 is an opportunity to demonstrate this policy coherence, to highlight the relationship between Nature and security in resolutions and identify meaningful steps towards preventing and reducing harm. States should also consider a dedicated resolution that examines the impact of conflicts on biodiversity and ecosystems such as the uprooting of native trees and vegetation; how protecting and restoring Nature can address the environmental harm that conflicts cause; and on how natural solutions can reduce the environmental degradation, biodiversity and ecosystem losses that undermines human security.

Biodiversity (CBD) post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

Closer linkages and increased synergies between UNEP, the UNEA process and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are needed. According to the 5th Global Biodiversity Outlook, **none of the Aichi targets were fully met by the end of 2020** as a result of ineffective implementation. Aichi target 13, aimed at addressing perverse incentives and subsidies to biodiversity destruction is one of them. We are calling for an **ambitious and equitable post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) that should reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and work towards recovery by 2050**. It must prevent extinctions, recover the abundance and diversity of life, and retain and restore ecosystem integrity. The post 2020 GBF must better regulate the commercial trade of wildlife, with a just transition and in full respect of traditional and Indigenous Peoples' rights and include the One Health/Welfare approach. The current voluntary approach by parties must not detract from legally binding obligations to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and to share the benefits equitably. The post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework must ensure **good governance**, be based on a strong **rights-based approach** and the **equitable sharing of benefits and costs**.

Corporations who contribute to biodiversity destruction and human rights violations cannot be allowed to promote **'false solutions' that greenwash practices and prevent real action**. Similar to other areas of environmental concern, biodiversity protection needs **legally binding obligations for companies**. Problematic terminology such as 'Nature-based solutions' can be misused as it lacks a clear definition. 'Nature-based solutions' are promoted by some business stakeholders to **advance the idea that 'Nature' can compensate for or 'offset' the continued burning of fossil fuels** rather than phasing out fossil fuels. This continues the utilitarian approach that views Nature only in terms of "services" and "benefits".

Sustainable practices from Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women and youth, continue to be ignored. There is an urgent need to embrace the values of Indigenous Peoples' worldviews and turn from a mindset of extraction to one of relationship with Nature. Major Groups are concerned about the target in the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework on increasing protected areas. This could lead to violations of the human rights of millions of Indigenous Peoples and other land-dependent communities if implemented without proper safeguards and the full respect of human rights. The rights of IPLCs need to be fully recognised and protected within the post-2020 GBF. We call on you to promote leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, institutionalizing open access to assessment outcomes to facilitate MGO insights on indicators.

Beat chemical and pesticide pollution now - link to SAICM

The COVID 19 pandemic has delayed the adoption of the UN Beyond 2020 framework on chemicals and waste until it is safe to reconvene face-to-face at the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5). The new framework should become a successor to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), the mandate of which ended in 2020. Work on the sound management of chemicals and waste cannot be put on hold. It must be continued, acknowledging the magnitude of chemical-related problems and the findings of the UNEP Assessment Report on Issues of Concern. The work must be intensified to achieve meaningful prevention and reduction of toxic chemicals emissions, waste generation, and contamination of people and the environment. The stakeholders should use the time between now and the face-to-face meetings to address gaps identified in the Global Chemical Outlook towards achieving the 2020 goal and contribute to the 2030 Agenda. **We, therefore, request a clear signal from UNEA 5.1 to the SAICM Bureau to extend the current SAICM until a new instrument is adopted.**

We need the post 2020 SAICM process and instrument to support **the highest standards for health and environment for chemicals of concern that are not yet covered by existing multilateral agreements**; and the **full disclosure of hazardous chemicals in all products** to protect occupational health and safety and human rights to information. We call on you to find global solutions to the impacts of **chemicals, including endocrine disrupting chemicals, as well as pesticides and radioactive pollution** on sustainability, health, biodiversity, and climate. It is high time to agree on the development of a global, legal mechanism to **phase out highly hazardous pesticides by 2030**. We call on you to work towards the full adoption of the **globally harmonised system of classification, labelling and safe handling of chemicals (GHS)** by all member states. We are concerned by the **double standard of exporting pesticides, and hazardous chemicals that are banned in their country of origin** and for replacement with safe chemical and non-chemical alternatives, and we call on you to step up the fight against illegal trade in chemicals and waste. We remind member states to implement the UNEA resolution on eliminating exposure to lead paint and promoting environmentally sound management of waste lead-acid batteries (UNEP/EA.3/Res.9) and expand efforts to include all types of lead exposures.

Oceans Conference

The UN Ocean Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14 is now anticipated in 2022. Meanwhile, a High-Level event in the Summer of 2021 is intended to maintain momentum. Oceanic waters cover over 70 per cent of the Earth's surface and sustains all life on our planet. The need is increasingly urgent to **protect it from threats like plastic pollution, abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear, overfishing, ocean heating, acidification and anthropogenic marine noise**. Those threats are eroding the ocean's ability to function as our life support system. The conditions are timely for governments to act through the globally agreed SDG 14 framework and following scientific knowledge. Ocean-related climate action needs to **recognize power imbalances and respect human rights** and the specific rights of **women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities**. Governance framework should ensure wide access to information and empowerment and participation of marginalised and vulnerable groups and an independent grievance mechanism. The Oceans Conference must **address food system transformation**, conservation of ocean biodiversity and natural resource management to promote inclusive ocean

governance and contribute to the United Nations Decade of Oceanic Science for Sustainable Development.

Food System Summit and food sovereignty

Food systems, and particularly **industrial animal agriculture and monoculture farming**, are a **major contributor to climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and overuse of water**. Increasing demand for meat and dairy products and the intensification of production are also major drivers of zoonotic risk. Intensification also **negatively impacts smallholder farmers, rural communities and food sovereignty**. Seventy percent of the world's food is produced by smallholders who are drivers of resilient agriculture which increases the capacity and sustainability of food systems. Yet, smallholders also suffer persistent hunger issues. Our food systems **urgently need to be reformed to be more equitable, holistic, resilient and sustainable**.

We call on UNEP and member states to actively support the **transformation to more resilient and sustainable food systems based on systemic change and addressing the underlying root causes and drivers**. This must include the support of regenerative, **agro-ecological systems**; environmentally-friendly **peri-urban and urban agriculture** and land tenure; **ecosystem restoration and Nature protection** in food production; addressing **food waste** throughout supply chains; adopting **animal welfare and a One Health-One Welfare** approach which reduces zoonotic risk; a **contraction and convergence to a healthy low level of animal sourced foods** and predominantly plant based diet; understanding the **risks of industrial fisheries and aquaculture**; setting high standards for **public procurement**, recognizing the value of **community-based initiatives** and food production and supporting small scale food producers (SSFP) and food sovereignty. Additionally, we need you to invest in **better education and awareness on sustainable and healthy diets**, coupled with strong labelling schemes, are critical to enabling sustainable consumption patterns.

To implement these transformations, it is critical to **re-target financing away from large-scale, intensive production, toward smaller-scale, local, resilient and sustainable practices**, to **reorient tax and subsidy architectures** to eliminate the hidden health and environmental costs of high animal product-consuming diets, and make sustainable, healthy diets available to all, to **end the dumping of food produce from highly subsidized to on local market** destroying smallholder farming and food sovereignty, and to **recognize the role of smallholder farmers** (Small scale food producers) through financial and legislative support and better insurance schemes.

It is vital that UNEP steers the **Food Systems Summit toward this transformation**. As it is now organized, the Summit supports corporatization of agriculture that drives profits for agribusiness and transnational corporations through intensification, GMOs, dangerous and polluting fertilizers, pesticides and antibiotics; and which destroys local food production and indigenous food culture; drives smallholder producers from their land; and causes hunger and malnutrition. **UNEP must ensure that the Summit acts on the three key levers of change which it has identified: dietary change; protecting/restoring Nature on farmland; and shifting to more sustainable farming**. The Summit must focus on natural resources management and biodiversity protection in our food systems. These changes must be made based on a just transition. The Summit must recognise the

imperative of protecting **human rights, in particular the rights of small-scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples, and peoples under occupation, war refugees, and armed conflict**, throughout our food systems, prioritizing the wellbeing of people, Nature and animals over infinite economic growth, while holding businesses accountable for harmful practices.

As Major Groups and Stakeholders we offer our expertise. We are a link between the world's top body of environmental decision-making, UNEA, and local communities and knowledge, people's real concerns as well as their support for your decisions. And we will be here to witness if UNEA 5 is the place where you show global leadership in addressing our joint challenges.