

**Statement of  
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**High Level Segment  
United Nations Environmental Assembly**

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Thank you, Madame Chair

My delegation is proud to be in Nairobi at this historic first meeting of the United Nations Environmental Assembly. We are also grateful to the government and people of Kenya for their warm welcome and gracious hospitality.

For nearly a quarter century I have had the good fortune to come frequently to this beautiful country to work with colleagues from every nation of the world on the full range of pressing environmental issues. While much is familiar, much has changed. Two years ago, Rio+20 produced a new awareness of how quickly the world is changing and of how profoundly these changes are affecting our planet's environment. Rio+20 also launched a process to develop by 2015 a limited set of sustainable development goals to apply universally to all countries.

That effort has been underway now for many months at United Nations Headquarters in New York, and the last meeting of the Open Working Group will take place there next month. The sustainable development goals likely to emerge will address the full spectrum of the most pressing problems facing us in the years ahead. They will not be confined to the environment, but environment must feature prominently in these goals because it is the basis for human life on this planet.

In this high level segment we are hearing from ministers and heads of delegation from a very broad spectrum of countries. Each speaks from a unique perspective, offering insights and wisdom rooted in the specific conditions and environmental problems each faces daily at home. It is vital that these perspectives be communicated clearly to delegations in New York seized with crafting sustainable development goals. We think this is best accomplished not by a whittled down, negotiated text but in a summary from our chair reflecting the full range of views presented.

Last evening, ministers participated in a lively discussion of climate change and of the urgency of reaching a new climate agreement in 2015 in Paris that is applicable to all Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, that is ambitious, and that can guide our efforts to transform our economies over coming decades. They also discussed the importance that the Lima Conference of the Parties this fall will play toward that end.

We are here today discussing the multiple, urgent threats to wildlife -- not only from illegal trafficking but also from demographic change, from urbanization and from declining habitat.

But at this first session of UNEA we have been seeking to deal with a broad range of other environmental problems as well – with air pollution, both indoor and outdoor, that is responsible now for some seven million deaths each year; with chemicals and waste, with water, with marine debris, with the interface between science and policy in addressing environmental problems, with public access to environmental information and with stakeholder participation in our deliberations.

With regard to these last two issues let me affirm – as we have often affirmed in the past – that just as environment is integral to sustainable development, inclusive stakeholder participation and access to environmental information are integral to environmental protection. We will not support efforts to undo or retreat from the achievements we have made in these areas, and we urge others to be steadfast as well.

For decades, UNEP has provided a forum in which to consider such problems and a platform from which nations have acted to address them. UNEP's recent achievements in this regard include the new Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biological Diversity and Ecosystem Services. But these are only the most recent – the list is too long to repeat in the short time available here but includes such things as the Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol on protecting ozone layer, launching -- with the World Meteorological Organization -- of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Regional Seas Program, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles.

In the outcome document from Rio+20, we agreed to strengthen the role of UNEP. That is being accomplished now with such changes as this first meeting of the United Nations Environmental Assembly, now including universal membership, the empowerment of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and the additional funding for UNEP from the United Nations regular budget.

We believe that UNEP has been and continues to be vital in helping nations to address the broad range of environmental problems each of us faces. But UNEP

operates in a complex international structure in which there are many players each with specific mandates. We think it important that UNEP continually define and redefine its comparative advantage and promote excellence within its mandate, working closely with others to achieve our common objectives with respect to the environment.

In particular, we believe that UNEP's role in scientific assessment of environmental problems is key – scientific assessment which can be as simple as seeking advice from an expert on how to approach a specific problem to something as complex as a periodic assessment of global climate change by the IPCC. UNEP cannot itself undertake these assessments, but UNEP can serve as a critical repository of information and advice on how to bring science and scientific assessment to bear in addressing environmental problems.

Another key area in which UNEP has a clear comparative advantage is in monitoring the global environment and making policy makers aware of continuing and emerging environmental problems. This is why we believe that such things as UNEP Live and the Global Environmental Outlook are so vital, and why we have sought to bring to the GEO the same kind of rigor that we bring to the IPCC's periodic scientific assessment reports.

Before concluding, chair, let me say that we are encouraged that member states have reached agreement on a new decision regarding air pollution. We believe this decision will prove instrumental in bringing a global focus to a burgeoning problem and will help build capacity in countries to address it – with significant benefits for their citizens today and tomorrow. We think it will be

important for UNEP to align its program of work to take into account this and other decisions we have made at this session.

Thank you, Madame Chair.