

H.E. Mr. Siim Kiisler, Minister of Environment of Estonia and President of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly address at the High-level segment of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 14 November 2018.

Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

As the President of the United Nations Environment Assembly, I am very honoured to be given this opportunity to convey my key messages at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference.

I am here in Sharm El-Sheikh to create synergies between three key priorities in achieving sustainable development goals: sustainable and efficient use of resources, maintaining and restoring ecosystems, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Last year's Environment Assembly agreed to commit to pollution-free planet in every capacity, in order to protect and improve human health and the wellbeing of ecosystems. Main momentum was generated in moving towards a pollution-free planet.

The next Assembly, which takes place in Nairobi in March 2019, will focus on the theme "Innovative solutions to environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production". In order to mobilize global action to reduce pollution, increase resource efficiency and maintain healthy ecosystems, we need to share and implement the enabling innovative solutions, and we need to promote Sustainable Consumption and Production – including addressing wasteful lifestyles.

I am sure that now you are questioning, what could be these innovative solutions? How could we make right decisions and enforce supportive regulations? Which enablers could we implement to protect our planet? How could we measure the progress?

In preparing the next United Nations Environment Assembly, I have reached an understanding, that the efficient environmental policy relies on three main pillars: accessible environmental data, sustainable resource management and creation of partnerships between all actors in society.

First of all, we should acknowledge that the availability of transparent, reliable, comparable and accessible environmental data is vital for decision making. Data is a powerful tool and shows how we perform. Take, for example, GDP as an indicator. It's well known and taken per se as an indicator for our economies. Besides measuring GDP growth, we should also measure the overall performance of environment. For that, we have to improve our environmental data monitoring systems. Only then are we truly able to make real progress in the transition towards sustainable societies.

It is of utmost importance to improve and develop environmental monitoring systems and ensure an open access to monitoring data. Integrating environmental data from traditional and new sources, including remote sensing and engaging also more citizen science opens so many new frontiers of knowledge and innovation. I believe that better quality environmental data gives us, the environment ministers and governments, a clear overview for example on the status of conservation areas, deforestation, desertification and illegal mining areas and on status of waterbodies and marine ecosystems. Adequate information is fundamental for supervising environmental compliance, for supporting decision making and improving policies, for example creating incentives to implement sustainable land management practices.

It is clear, that tackling environmental challenges creates new business opportunities. If governments enforce the regulation to support sustainable resource management, then there are clear business opportunities for providing solutions for afforestation, for recultivation of mining areas and for waste management. This synergy is what we are actually looking for and it gives the new perspective for environment policy. Investing in preventative measures and restoration initiatives makes sound economic sense. Of course we should expect responsible actions from private sector to prevent or reduce the negative impact to our environment.

Neither the environment ministers, nor the whole governments can achieve sustainable development only by themselves. Common understanding is, that politicians have the power to fix all the problems immediately. I am sure, that many of my colleagues here today are familiar with this perception. We need the support and contribution from all the citizens. Access to environmental education for our children creates the foundation for responsible and sustainable societies. Furthermore, we should integrate sustainable consumption and production disciplines into everyday school programmes at all levels. Introducing citizens sustainable ways of living

drives our societies to act more sustainably. Behavioural changes of consumers also creates demand and opportunities for private sector. And consumers are not only citizens, because important share of national level consumptions are decided by the public sector. We need changes at every level. Only recently we learnt that humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970 because of overconsumption. It is in our hands to prevent similar findings in the future.

As the President of UNEA, I envisage mainstreaming biodiversity into sustainable consumption and production by the following steps:

- To commit ourselves to develop a global environmental data strategy and action plan by 2021.
- To develop sustainable land management programmes, including afforestation, wetland restoration and mining area recultivation.
- To improve national waste management systems and commit to phase out single-use plastic products, to protect our land and marine ecosystems.
- To create sustainable financing opportunities for eco-innovative solutions, including nature-based solutions and developing also ecosystem services
- And to increase sustainable public procurements to create a market for sustainable products and services.

I invite you all to share your views, ideas and experiences to catalyse our efforts and actions towards healthy environment for healthy people. We must keep in mind, that nature does not need us, we need nature!

Thank you for your attention!

Sharm El-Sheikh
14 November 2018