

July 13, 2017

Re: Response to the draft ED report, "Towards a Pollution Free Planet"

Dear colleagues:

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on the draft report for UNEA-3 from the Executive Director of UN Environment, "Toward a Pollution Free Planet."

We approve of the general outline and content, as presented, expecting that the copy editing process will also have caught the small errors in grammar, etc.

Our concern relates to something that is missing, along the same lines that we flagged in the initial outline document from the UNEA President. There needs to be language relating the issues of pollution to the concerns of indigenous peoples and to faith communities.

First, a collective response to planetary pollution must mobilize all stakeholders. Both indigenous peoples and faith communities bring different perspectives, values and concerns to the subject than are currently reflected in the draft document.

Second, language addressing these missing elements could be added as an annex to the report, understanding that the processes of UNEA-3 do not easily lend themselves to a discussion of these different perspectives, values and concerns.

Third, while the report correctly identifies the environmental costs and risks associated with pollution, and identifies the changes in policy and behaviour that the situation requires, it deals with the issue entirely from a secular, arguably Western perspective – in fact, the same commercial and industrial perspective that has resulted in the degradation of the biosphere we share with other living things. At the very least, there needs to be acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of the planetary biosphere and the myriad species that are at risk of extinction because of the damage caused by human activity. Whether this is expressed in the language of Creation, of Pacha Mama, or of balance and harmony with Nature, it reflects a concern for the relationship with the Earth that is our home, beyond the extrinsic commercial values that regard it as a commercial resource, needing to be conserved for the use of future generations.

Fourth, expressions of the intrinsic value of life and our relationship with the Earth and its creatures are inextricably interwoven not only with the beliefs, customs and traditions of indigenous peoples world wide, but also with the beliefs of all the major religious and spiritual traditions. Not to include this perspective in the report is to silence the strongest voices against the destruction of the biosphere that have protested these actions since the beginning. It is not just commercial and industrial activities that create pollution, but the distorted values people hold that empower and encourage a lifestyle in which private benefit trumps the importance of the planetary commons we all share – and which we hold in trust, as stewards, for future generations.

Should the importance of including this perspective be agreed by the Executive Director and UN Environment, I would be willing to help draft such language for a subsequent draft.

Sincerely,

(Rev.) Peter Denton, B.A. (Hons.), M.A., M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.  
United Church of Canada (MGS/NGO) [phdenton@shaw.ca](mailto:phdenton@shaw.ca)