



UNEP
Ministerial declaration of the UNEA5

The written inputs by the European Union and its Member States regarding the preparation of the ministerial declaration of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly

General comments

The EU and its MS avail themselves of the opportunity to reiterate their full support to the Norwegian UNEA5 Presidency and would like to thank the Presidency for the opportunity to express preliminary views on the content of UNEA5 Ministerial Declaration.

The COVID-19 outbreak, whose likely zoonotic origin is linked to the unsustainable use of nature and the wider environment, is changing the world in unexpected ways. UNEA, as the global environmental authority within the United Nations system, is well placed to promote actions to help the international community to rise to this challenge as well as the wider challenge of delivering a better future. The EU and its MS reiterate their appreciation for the UNEA5 theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the SDGs” and the transparent and inclusive process that led to its adoption.

With most major summits of 2020 cancelled or postponed to 2021, it is likely that UNEA5 will be the first high-level global environmental gathering after the 2020 COVID-19 crisis, presenting an excellent opportunity to set a positive tone to build back better, provide guidance for an ambitious, green recovery, to promote strong, clear pathways to achieve SDGs and set the tone for other conferences to follow. Therefore, we need to use this occasion to come together as the environmental community, communicate clearly on the new priority and make a strong case for, and provide guidance on the way to undertake, a green and sustainable recovery that will lead to the transformation needed for sustainable development and leaves no one behind. As stated by the Executive Director of UNEP, “while the efforts of all capitals are correctly focused on preventing human suffering, as parts of the world move slowly towards recovery, the environmental agenda remains one of our most powerful insurance policies in preventing future global pandemics like COVID-19”.

The way we deal with nature, including the need to recover and maintain natural habitats and addressing wildlife trade in order to avoid new outbreaks of zoonotic diseases, can play a major role in this regard. Of key importance will be the way we adapt our economic models to the new circumstances, in particular the patterns of our consumption and production.

We recall that 2020 was envisaged as the Super year for Nature, in order to address, among other issues, the alarming rate of loss of biodiversity highlighted by the Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the IPBES published in 2019.

As a consequence, an ambitious and actionable global biodiversity framework should be adopted at CBD COP15, now rescheduled for 2021, with measurable targets and indicators on the drivers of biodiversity loss and a robust transparency framework to foster implementation. We must mobilize financial resources to implement that framework and enhance the ambition of our national biodiversity strategies and actions plans.

1. What would you, as government, welcome as the most important elements and/or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?

The messages of the Ministerial Declaration should reflect the theme of UNEA5 and ensure adequate interlinkages between the environmental SDGs and the other (economic, social, peace and partnership) SDGs and be built around the four transformative action areas of the theme, which might also be helpful for the structuring of the document. These should, at the same time also reflect outcomes and conclusions from the main topics and resolutions of UNEA5.

We should identify actions and initiatives for nature that are coherent with the need for a holistic, systemic and forward-looking approach to environmental sustainability.

Green recovery

The current situation makes it necessary to urgently incentivise a **green post COVID-19 recovery**. This recovery should **reconfirm our commitment to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda**, as well as the Paris Agreement in our efforts to rebuild our economies, bearing in mind the responsibility to future generations.

Green finance and investment needed for the recovery after the COVID-19 crisis will be an opportunity to reboot our economies in a more sustainable way, and create green growth and jobs and improve the resilience of our economies. Key action areas include shifting to a more sustainable financial system, including fiscal reforms, and to circular economy models, that enable us to break out of fossil fuel dependency and promote the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation.

Green recovery places natural capital at the centre of solutions in combination with the need to leverage innovation and sustainable consumption and production patterns. This will be key for a successful recovery, which should be based on synergies between policies in the areas of climate, biodiversity, pollution and harmful chemicals, energy, transport, infrastructure, employment, trade, development and agriculture, coupled with innovative entrepreneurship, sustainable finance and maximizing the opportunities provided by digitalization. An integrated approach will give us a robust basis for a coherent, cost-effective and results-oriented global response.

Green recovery also needs to be socially sustainable and inclusive. Women and men must have the same opportunities to be involved in relevant processes and vulnerable groups, youth, indigenous peoples, communities and ecosystems must be taken into consideration through a rights-based approach.

We need to ensure that the recovery is based on green, just as well as socially sustainable transition and supports urgent global actions and the critical and transformative change that will need to take place to stop the loss of biodiversity and its ecosystem services.

Economic recovery support packages, including adjustment of legislation should therefore be “green” and involve relevant types of incentives to promote the development of circular and sustainable business models. The declaration should also include suggestions on effective ways to integrate this into economic stimulus efforts at all levels.

The declaration should also highlight the need for enhanced awareness and understanding of the natural world and the place of people in it, including its importance for our health, quality of life and access to key resources, to promote public support for effective policies and measures.

Protecting biodiversity and ecosystems for resilient societies and economies

Healthy ecosystems are a critical prerequisite for sustainable development, inclusive and resilient economies and societies. Preservation and restoration of Earth’s natural capital, the halting and preventing further biodiversity loss and fighting climate change is crucial, including through an integrated landscape planning that encompasses sustainable forest management, land use and agriculture.

It would be essential to start the declaration by raising attention to the **link between biodiversity decline and the outbreak of pandemics**, such as COVID-19. Human activities that disrupt biodiversity, such as deforestation, land-use change, ecosystems simplification, markets for wild animals, poaching and illegal wildlife trade, and pollution, including the use of pesticides, can contribute to the extinction of species and increase the risk of emergence of pandemics.

The COVID-19 pandemic underlines the urgency of joint and dedicated action on economic recovery, health protection and climate change and ecological crisis, **restoring and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems** and avoiding the transmission of infectious diseases. We recall the importance of integrating environment, climate and biodiversity policies, including the NDCs, when designing stimulus packages.

Nature for Health includes very important actions related to **limiting the future emergence of zoonotic diseases**. Reforms and investments for COVID-19 recovery should **address systemic threats to nature and the root causes** of the zoonotic diseases such as destruction of natural habitats, wildlife trade and consumption. This should be accompanied by support measures for the poorest developing countries to ensure food security.

We should **promote the integration of biodiversity in all relevant sectors and** by fostering public participation in decision-making processes, and improving the effectiveness of access to justice, and the need to protect environmental human rights defenders from persecution and harm.

The **links between all the multilateral processes contributing to the implementation of the SDGs**, especially but not limited to the preparation of the post-2020 biodiversity strategic framework, should be strengthened.

Countries should all support UNEP and FAO in implementing the **UN Decade on ecosystem restoration** and to contribute to its success.

Effective management of protected areas and the role of ecological connectivity to obtain significant biodiversity improvements should be highlighted, along with the role of biodiversity conservation and restoration and the need for a transformational change as one of the key elements for a green recovery as well as for advancing towards SDGs.

Circular economy, waste and chemicals

Sustainable management and use of Earth's natural resources in a way that allows existing and future generations to meet their needs, within the planetary boundaries, should be placed in the focus and given adequate attention.

Circular economy can serve as a model for sustainable and green economy. The most important element will be to help ensure that countries “build back better and greener”, focusing on a green transformation that will lead to sustainable consumption and production patterns and circular economy and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

In this context, emphasis should be placed on **policies that encourage the safe circularity of products**, in conjunction with the private sector, namely, to improve the durability of products, enable reuse and allow repair.

At the same time, it is also important to reinforce **waste management policy from a circular perspective**, with the aim of allowing the recovery of quality materials, guaranteeing their reintroduction into the value chain of production process. We should also continue exploring long-term sustainable solutions to the production and use of high impact materials, including the possibility to work towards and international agreement on plastics.

We are particularly interested in continuing with the **progress on Resolution 4/1 and bringing SCP and Circular Economy to the forefront of the global debates** as well as enhancing discussions around natural resource management and keeping resource consumption within planetary boundaries.

We also need continuous **concerted efforts towards a framework for international sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020** to be agreed at ICCM5 in July 2021. We need to raise ambition, particularly with regard to the strengthening of the science-policy interface. One of the greatest challenges remains the mobilization of financial resources for the implementation of the new framework and the capacity building for the sustainable management of chemicals throughout their life cycle, including waste. The sustainable chemicals approach should be based on the application of the precautionary principle, reflecting the scientific evidence on the risk they pose. The increased use of toxic chemicals to strengthen disinfection routines in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic and the issue of safe disposal of healthcare waste has shown the relevance of this important challenge.

Climate change and air pollution

With important meetings within the UNFCCC being postponed, it is essential that we **keep the momentum on climate action** high on the agenda. We need to step up the global efforts to tackle climate change in light of the latest available science, especially the IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. With UNFCCC COP26 being rescheduled for 2021, we stress the urgency of enhanced ambition in order to ensure the highest possible mitigation and adaptation efforts by all parties, and highlight the importance of all countries updating their NDCs as agreed in Paris, taking into account the need to increase clarity,

transparency and understanding (ICTU) of their NDCs and publishing their long-term strategies in 2020 in order to ensure the full application and implementation of the Paris Agreement. We also recall the need to step up efforts on the enhancement of adaptive capacity and to align all financial flows with the Paris Agreement. We should express the confidence that the COP26 agenda will bring an ambitious outcome.

We **strongly support synergies between climate, environment and health** to show that the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as well as the Paris Agreement will depend on a crosscutting consideration of issues.

Air pollution is one of the greatest environmental risks to human health and one of the main avoidable causes of death and disease globally which also affects the economy, ecosystems and climate. WHO estimates that 4.2 million of premature deaths globally are linked to ambient air pollution.

The global dimension of the air pollution should be recognized and this should lead to effective action to promote integrated approaches to the environmental policy formulation that **aligns economic recovery with air protection**.

Instruments for implementation

In this context, advocating **green technologies** and advancing in new science-based technologies and innovative solutions to reduce pollutants (including greenhouse gases) and achieve climate policy goals should be a priority in curbing climate change.

Digital solutions are key enablers for transformational changes and achieving SDGs. Here we also need to share best practices in order to increase sustainability of ICT sector aimed at reducing its environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions.

Special focus should be put on using **nature-based solutions**. NBS have a high potential to tackle several environmental global challenges we are currently facing, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, invasive alien species, land degradation, disaster risk reduction, water and food security, human health and poverty eradication. The need for clear and widely accepted framework to guide the successful application of nature-based solutions should be addressed.

UNEP's crucial role in the climate and environment security nexus should be considered, in particular with regard to guiding **global environmental and climate data management**, by increasing the ambition of the global environmental data strategy and ensuring united support for it. Strengthening this role could help address the need to strengthen foresight capacity by working towards accessible and interoperable international data on climate and environment risks.

2. How can the Environment Assembly make a significant contribution to Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a global scale? In doing so, you may take into account the preparation for the meeting, its conduct and follow-up, as well as its relationship to other meetings and processes.

UNEA will keep its authority and leading role by providing **key messages for the most acute environmental issues** in relation to international environmental processes.

The EU and its MS have always supported the **approach not to consider UNEA sessions in isolation, but rather build on previous UNEA's work and its effective implementation** and further development meaning that already launched work streams need to be continued and the mandates given by previous resolutions fulfilled. We need to link these work streams with UNEA5 core emerging priorities, which will put **nature-based solutions** that contribute to sustainable development and the green recovery in its focus. For instance, in case of UNEA resolutions 4/1, 4/6 and 4/9 by means of significantly advancing the work streams initiated at previous UNEAs, the EU and its MS will strive for UNEA5 to lay the ground for a global action on plastics as well as for promoting circular economy through establishing a Global Circular Economy/Resource Alliance.

UNEA5 should assert itself as an environmental policy guiding and action shifting universal authority platform of the post COVID-19 reality by **advancing international environmental governance and building on synergies and political momentum for climate, biodiversity and chemicals-waste global frameworks**. In this context, enhancing cooperation among UNEP and the multilateral environmental agreements is very important, especially now, in order to focus on green transition in a coherent manner.

Since UNEA5 will likely open a sequence of high level meetings of key relevance for shaping the environmental and sustainable development agenda, including the Climate, Biodiversity, Chemicals and Waste meetings, the Food Systems Summit, and the Stockholm+50 Conference, UNEA should **use its authoritative voice to set the ambition bar very high, while striving to achieve more coherence and synergies between various environmental processes** as well as set the outline and strong political message for their future work.

Other important goals and targets that the UNEA5 Ministerial Declaration should boost are those related to the **main drivers of biodiversity loss** identified by 2019 IPBES Global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services: land and sea-use changes, overexploitation of biodiversity, notably through unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices, pollution (pesticides, plastics and microplastics, fertilizers, heavy metals), invasive alien species, climate change and unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

In particular, it is vital to **enhance the efficiency of cooperation between thematic MEAs and UNEP/UNEA**. One possible way to engage MEAs would be by using UNEA as a platform for bringing them together, so that they are able to better coordinate their agendas and action plans at a high level. Another possible way could be by saving and identifying position and roles of the governing bodies of MEAs in the sessions of UNEA, through the involvement of the respective presidents of the COPs and bureaus. This could also help UNEA and MEAs to develop coordinated inputs for HLPF.

UNEA5 should make a clear **contribution to preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems in the world**. Protecting healthy ecosystems and restoring damaged and destroyed ones is also an effective, preventive and cost-efficient way for people to work in sync with nature to address the most pressing challenges facing humanity today.

Despite difficult circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we deem it important to keep as much as possible in line with the UNEA5-linked roadmap concerning resolutions 3/7 and 4/6 on marine litter and microplastic and continue with the discussions in the expert open-ended working group in order to widen the scope and develop legally binding framework targeting the whole lifecycle of plastic in different environmental compartments including water, air and land.

We also support the process that will result in a more impactful Global Environment Outlook as well as prepare a science-policy input to UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50.

There are benefits in **linking any UNEA proposals or desired outcomes closely to the relevant SDGs**, which will also make it easier to plug into the HLPF 2021 and to make the connection to the planned meeting of the Stockholm+50 commemoration. The Agenda 2030 and the SDGs offer a unique benchmark to work towards it. In particular, SDGs 12, 13, 14 and 15 are likely to be principal points of the Assembly. We should use this ready available framework to cluster the various work streams under UNEA5 and, more importantly, to monitor progress.

UNEA5 presents an excellent **opportunity to identify initiatives which help the international community to effectively design transformative actions** and collective commitments, especially in the nexus areas such as climate – biodiversity – resources management.

UNEA5 could **add value with clear messages on what best practice examples** and particularly effective and sustainable nature-based solutions are, that can deliver impact across various SDGs.

We support UNEP's proposal that at UNEA5 member states and stakeholders are encouraged to make commitments, individually or as groups. In this regard, UNEP could take a more active role in the process leading up to the meeting as well as in the follow-up to UNEA5 in order to support and facilitate coordination of regional commitments between financiers, private businesses and governments. For example, the UNEP program for regional seas is well placed to provide such support and accelerate regional implementation of concrete measures. UNEA5 could be an opportunity to add more members to already existing initiatives and thus potentially contribute to the reduction in the number of resolutions. The follow-up will present a challenge, but UNEP already has solid experience from following up on resolutions and the voluntary contributions from UNEA3.

We also underline the **importance of working with all countries and stakeholders**, including indigenous peoples and local communities, women, youth, science and business/the private sector, as well as to include these stakeholders in efforts at national and various other levels of governance. UNEA5 should also **seek horizontal cross-sectoral approaches within UN organisations** combating pressures on nature such as IMO, FAO and others.

The launch of UNEP@50 at UNEA5 in 2021 and charting a course towards Stockholm+50 in 2022, present a unique opportunity for accelerating action on environment. The EU and its MS believe that these opportunities should contribute to the environment in a supportive and complementary manner. We therefore encourage and **welcome the communication between UNEP, the UNEA President, Kenya and Sweden in the preparations for the launch of UNEP@50 at UNEA5 together with the Stockholm+50** so that the different meetings may proceed in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Bearing in mind the necessity for full implementation of international environmental agreements and improved environmental governance in general, it is important to take action to implement the recommendations in the annex to UNGA resolution 73/333. An important part of the outcome of the UNEA-5 will be the preparation of an ambitious high-level political declaration and the Stockholm+50 high level meeting is an excellent opportunity for its adoption.

The COVID-19 crisis will permanently change many things. We need to embrace the change, keeping in mind the crucial role of the environment for the achievement of overall sustainable development, UNEA5 is an excellent opportunity to make the best out of this situation.

While keeping the agreed theme (nature and the SDGs) at the centre of UNEA5, the Assembly should also **explore initiatives (and possibly pledges) from the global environment community** that can effectively address the environmental dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis, such as:

- 1) its origin (zoonotic disease, destruction of natural habitats, unsustainable use of biodiversity);
- 2) its sound management (e.g. associated pollution, including healthcare waste, sustainable use of biodiversity, including wild animal species);
- 3) the recovery (SCP, sustainable finance, enhancing resilience, environmental health, synergetic pathways for social, economic and environmental recovery);
- 4) the prevention of new outbreaks of nature-human related diseases/pandemics.

Emphasizing and clearly **communicating the linkages between the spread of pandemics and the role of biodiversity and ecosystems**, including food security, would make a strong case in favour of the Assembly's relevance in the current situation.

Furthermore, **synergies between improving health and strengthening actions for nature to achieve SDGs need to be further explored**. There is a need to strengthen the role of UNEP in the area of air quality and chemicals' management by further encouraging governments to take action across sectors to improve air quality as well as to address future threats from chemicals-related problems by taking into account sustainable product design and industrial process policies.