

We highly appreciate the participatory process and our engagement through this call for inputs and we apologize for the delay in sending our input.

- **On the first question: What would you, as government/organization/stakeholder, welcome as the most important elements and /or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?**

Following the COVID-19 crisis that the whole world is going through and that forced us all into more localization and less inter-connectivity, we as environment stakeholders have the duty to ensure that adaptation strategies post-COVID-19 are planned with an environmental focus. The economic crisis that was accentuated with the pandemic can be a driver of serious environmental set-backs if environmental concerns are not seriously enforced in governments' decision and strategies moving forward. In these critical times, we need to rethink the humanity's understanding of economies and equity, revisiting our measurement for wealth and resilience (i.e. high GDPs vs thriving ecosystems whose services are equitable in nature and resilient to crises). The time we took out of our busy lives has helped the planet in several ways and has drawn for us many lessons that we need to ensure we grasp fully and integrate in future strategies and adaptation steps so we are all moving forward and not bringing ourselves back to ground Zero.

From this standpoint, and being a landscape restoration NGO that focuses primarily on landscape restoration and conservation, we do strongly back up your primary focus placed on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services and sees it as a major driver of progress on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 13 and 15. With the current food crisis, the message should clearly link ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation to food security and sustainable management of natural resources for the sustainable livelihood of local communities. We do fear that the current food crisis might turn into further deforestation and intensive agricultural practices with loads of pesticides on the environment. UNEA5 message should clearly stand against strategies that could destroy natural ecosystem and rather highlight natural resources as a source of healthy sustainable living.

Biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services also covers oceans where issues of waste management and littering become a critical concern that can only be addressed globally, or at least regionally. Being part of the Mediterranean basin, Lebanon has been working with other UNEP partners in the region on several solutions, including the new Adopt a beach guidelines for reducing marine and land-based littering. We do hope that the ministerial declaration encourages further serious and long-term regional collaborations among governments on ocean-related issues, and within each country, encourage collaboration between governments, NGOs and local community stakeholders to advance all the SDGs, in an inclusive and participatory manner, especially with a gender-inclusive lens.

Another critical issue for all of us to be able to effectively work towards the set SDGs is data limitation. The lack of data or data accuracy is affecting local and global planning as well as implementation of projects related to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services. This is where regional collaborations (under SDG 17) can work on supporting countries to reach a similar baseline of datasets to facilitate project-level collaborations and provide us all with a better understanding of the planet we live on.

- **On question 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.

As started with this consultation and all the other consultations conducted around UNEA5, the participatory approach and inclusiveness of all stakeholders is a practice that we are proud to be part of and hope to continue to see along the way.

We hope that the Environment Assembly comes out with concrete and practical steps for moving the environmental agenda up the ladder in each of the member governments and for ensuring that post-COVID 19 adaptation strategies are developed with an environmental focus. Enforcing a change in politics towards including environmental considerations in every country-level decision should continue to be our aspiration until this becomes a reality around the world and we believe that our case is stronger than ever on this level.

We also hope that the UNEA can push for increased data availability and mutual support to reach a similar baseline among countries, as well as new policies that optimize land use planning in a bottom-up approach that flags out ways and patterns of exploitation of ecosystems to insure optimal sustainability of ecosystem functions under current and future climate change situations, and promote exchange of ecosystem services between communities by means of protection of existing ecosystems as payment methods and not by means of replacement with technological solutions, so we can reach a reform of social behavior towards sustainable consumption, re-evaluation of needs and values. we also believe that regional and local collaborations should be discussed in depth at the Assembly, to explore ways for improving collaboration channels between governments and NGOs and community stakeholders as well as improving collaboration for funding and regional projects post-COVID19 (in light of the reduced interconnectivity and increased localization).