

Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

UNEA - 5

Second Input from Chile

I. Introductory remarks

Chile wishes to refer to the communication sent by H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and Minister of Climate and Environment of Norway, on 29 June, inviting to comment and further develop the first draft outline document for the preparation of the Ministerial Outcome Document for UNEA 5.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide further comments on this discussion. As we mentioned in our first communication, our view is that a participatory process is the most appropriate way to proceed on the preparation of UNEA 5, and we are pleased to be able to express our opinions to the Presidency on the proposed document.

We divide this note in two main subjects: first, comments on the ministerial outline document and; second, some ideas on potential concrete measures that countries may want to advance so that UNEA 5 has a visible impact on strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a multilateral level.

II. Ministerial Outline Document – General remarks

We agree on the contents of the outline document in general, as they are in line with our expectations after our last exchange. Two elements are particularly relevant from the initial part of the proposed document. The first one is highlighting the unquestionable contribution of science whose evidence has shown us the urgency of advancing in a more ambitious environmental policy, and that all new regulations should be designed and implemented based on scientific evidence and findings.

The second idea relates to SDG and their environmental pillar. As the pandemic crisis increases the pressure in the economic and social elements of sustainable development, we consider that reaffirming that the environment is a fundamental part of sustainability and that is equally relevant to social and economic considerations, including that environmental protection may have social and economic co-benefits should be expressed in the final document.

Comments on some of the sections of the proposed document may be found below:

a. Sustainable recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused one of the greatest social and economic crises the world has faced in recent history, affecting peoples' lives in manifold ways. However, this crisis is also a unique opportunity to use this crisis to accelerate our transformation to a more inclusive, cleaner, healthier, low carbon and resilient economy that leads us to live in harmony with nature, as the CBD 2050 vision aims to.

A sustainable recovery shall focus on people needs and foster economic growth together with environmental protection, boosting sustainable investments with a fast quality job creation while, at the same time, accelerating the decarbonization of our energy matrix, reducing pollution, building clean transport systems, sustainable cities, green infrastructure, and reducing the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. Therefore, we believe that the ministerial outcome may point out that environment protection represents the best pathway for generating social and economic benefits through sustainable investments in a context of design and implementation of post pandemic recovery plans. Environmental protection is the only path to build back better.

A clear mention on the need of basing these plans under the no regression and intergenerational equity principles of sustainable development may be a positive addition, expressing the strong multilateral commitment of the Ministers of Environment that no recovery policy, plan or programme will be implemented through the weakening of local environmental regulation.

The lack of an international agreed language regarding sustainable recovery should not be an obstacle for this needed call for action, taking into account the state of global emergency jointly caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, the climate crisis and biodiversity and ecosystem services loss. Clearly including the concept of sustainable recovery on this ministerial outcome document could work as a basis and may be useful for future discussions.

b. Holistic approaches and Nature-based solutions

We welcome the recommendation of the Presidency of highlighting the relevance of biodiversity conservation in all its levels (genetic, species and ecosystems) and its direct relation with human health. After the COVID pandemic, recognizing this relationship and the need to improve protection of nature to save human lives should be a moral imperative and a minimum element to be included in the Ministerial Declaration.

We would also support the inclusion of language that expresses the need of further integrating different international environment agendas, such as climate, desertification, biodiversity, and oceans, given that these are phenomena that interrelate and impact each other. Identifying links between them and potential synergies in international conventions may be a positive and concrete contribution so that UNEA that can propose guidelines for sustainable development on its many environment goals.

III. Potential concrete measures

a. Sustainable recovery and green finance

We consider that the development of environmental financial instruments or “green finance” is one of the most interesting opportunities that may appear from the current crisis. The addition of this concept may consider many alternatives, from a strong public investment in environment – friendly projects and technologies, with high climate ambition and biodiversity protection considerations to incentives to private investments with strong compliance of environmental protection standards.

As an example, Chile has recently introduced its Green Sovereign Bond Framework, certified by the Climate Bonds Initiative (CBI), the highest standard for this type of instruments. The standard has provided an environmental consistent criterion for sustainable investment selection: climate change;

air quality improvement; long-term low-carbon infrastructure; conservation of biodiversity and water resources, as well as reduction of water and energy consumption.

During 2019 and through 2020, a total of \$6,200 million US dollars was issued. These green bonds obtained the lowest interest rates in history, being a concrete demonstration that investing in green projects is a beneficial action for the environment, societies, and economies.

UNEA 5 may be an opportunity to share good experiences regarding sustainable investments and green finance, including the use of concrete instruments and how they allow economic and social development with strong environmental considerations, as an interesting opportunity so that countries can consider them in their future development plans and programmes. It is also a chance of bringing together policy agendas of different government institutions so that environment is mainstreamed into their decision making, considering the relevance of Finance Ministries on the general policymaking processes. Future collaboration projects between different countries and regions may also be identified through this exercise during UNEA 5.

b. NDC, just transition and nature – based solutions

As we expressed on our first input, Chile firmly believes that the NDC updating process is an opportunity to adopt a wholistic approach, recognizing the impact that climate change is having into individuals and societies, the opportunities and challenges identified related to the climate crisis, pointing towards sustainable development.

Chile's NDC includes a social pillar with the criteria for an adequate implementation of our climate commitments considering the sustainable development goals: A just transition strategy; water security; gender equality; cost efficiency; nature-based solutions; and indigenous peoples' knowledge. This new NDC sets clear goals to be accomplished by 2030, establishing our roadmap for a sustainable recovery.

The progress in our new NDC will allow us to further develop other climate instruments, particularly our long-term strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and our climate change framework law, which is currently being analysed by our Congress. Also, our Just Transition Strategy is being developed with our Energy Ministry, so that the decarbonization processes considers the needs of the people and their territories.

We invite Member States to consider this experience and the UNEA Presidency to identify potential collaboration efforts so that we take the opportunity of fulfilling our climate commitments together with a holistic design and implementation of climate instruments. A concrete expression of this idea could be added in the Ministerial Declaration, with the aim of recognizing that climate and development policies are complementary to each other. The ministerial outcome is an opportunity to acknowledge that NDC updates may be more challenging in the current context, however, and as science has clearly established, there is a significant challenge in fulfilling the Paris Agreement targets with the current level of aggregated efforts.

While COVID-19 may have postponed COP26, it has not postponed the need for Parties to deliver on their commitments under the Paris Agreement – most importantly, the submission of more ambitious NDCs and Long-Term Climate Strategies this year 2020.

We are in a turning point in progress on climate change, and we all have to continue playing a leadership role in encouraging governments to present as soon as possible enhanced NDCs as the main tool for delivering mitigation and adaptation ambition, and to elaborate long-term low emission developing strategies, aimed at carbon neutrality by 2050.

Today, we have an opportunity to boost climate action through enhanced NDCs which can help our society to recover from COVID-19 in a cleaner, more inclusive, and sustainable way.

c. Biodiversity

There are opportunities of achieving biodiversity and ecosystem conservation objectives so that they contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole. Some minimum elements to achieve this is having appropriate institutions dedicated to biodiversity at a local level, keeping the process of establishing and effectively implementing and managing land and marine protected areas and promoting the sustainable use and value of biodiversity for human well-being, controlling potential threats for ecosystems and species. We believe in fostering the effective protection of 30% of the planet by 2030, to maintain the correct functioning of our planet and the existence of life.

Sectorial strategies need to be strengthened, including integrated management of land and marine landscapes, promoting sustainable practices, identifying potential measures that may contribute to ecosystem health and resilience considering spatial and regional elements, among other actions. Mainstreaming biodiversity in areas such as energy, rural and urban development, agricultural, silvicultural, fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism sectors and policy agendas are fundamental. The integration of biodiversity in across all sector shall be included in the Post 2020 Framework and climate action if we want to set the ambition needed to reach a better future world.

Recognizing nature-based solutions in the NDC is a key step, as it recognizes landscape restoration as a long-term goal, aiming to carbon neutrality and biodiversity conservation. These initiatives can be incorporated in all areas related to biodiversity, including forests coastal and marine protected areas, wetlands, peatlands, among others.

Forest sustainable management is directly related to areas such as climate mitigation adaptation, water security, disaster risk reduction, vulnerable groups inclusion and other nature's contribution to people, with a special focus on gender, under a general framework of nature based solutions. Forest ecosystem protection is related to people's well-being, with health, identity, emotional and spiritual benefits, as well as culture and tourism development. There is potential of integrating the forest protection agenda with agriculture, through national conservation strategies to refer to related phenomena such as climate change, desertification and land and vegetation degradation.

Global assessments such as the ones of IPBES and IPCC recognize that protected areas and restoration projects are fundamental strategies so that human dominated landscapes can support biodiversity and nature's contributions to people. Therefore, national landscape restoration strategies can be a concrete step to develop common understanding between the environment and economic activities, including ministries with different agendas. Landscape restoration may also contribute to water security, which is a relevant element for countries which have been stricken by drought. The incorporation of nature-based solutions such allow an appropriate water access, sustaining

ecosystems while also recognizing that grey infrastructure is not enough to achieve sustainable objectives.

Wetlands and peatlands are ecosystems with high carbon capture capacity, providing other relevant ecosystem services related to adaptation, such as maintaining water quality and flows, flood reduction and temperature regulation in near areas. More information on the positive impacts of the conservation of these ecosystems, especially on their role on GHG reduction, could be a contribution. Further conservation and developing knowledge on these ecosystems, with standard metrics for their mitigation and adaptation assessments, as well as measuring co-benefits, is considered as a necessary step.

The ocean is the main climate regulator of the planet, provides most of the food and protein for millions and due to many of its species and dynamics, produces much of the oxygen we breathe. Unfortunately, our knowledge and understanding of such a complex and rich ecosystem remains very low. Though, we are aware that the ocean is experiencing an alarming loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, mainly associated with the direct exploitation of its resources, often leading to its overexploitation and also suffering many biogeochemical changes, such as acidification or deoxygenation, that we do not necessarily understand or can project its consequences. Further oceanic investigation is needed now more than ever.

Supporting initiatives such as United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), which was established to support efforts to reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health and gather different stakeholders behind a common framework to create improved conditions for sustainable development of the ocean may be an example of a concrete contribution that high level officers may want to exchange and find ways to further support during UNEA 5.

d. Chemicals

The current emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the global dependence on chemicals, elements that if not used sound and consciously and with the necessary safeguards, the natural balance of the planet is being disturbed. Considering this situation, an update of commitments and measures becomes increasingly necessary and urgent, accompanied by constant awareness aligned with scientific evidence and findings. Undoubtedly, this will be achieved through joint work at the multisectoral level, generating trust alliances between the different actors committed to these matters.

In the case of Chile, there has been permanent coordinated work between the public, private, academic, and civil society sectors to address challenges in chemical safety and chemical management from the perspective of their life cycle (manufacture, use and final disposal). In this context, in recent years, a series of cooperation frameworks have been carried out with the academy, as well as training for actors of the public sector on the management of chemicals, to address the public sector challenges related to chemicals.

These activities correspond to a first stage in our planning, which is followed by training aimed at the private sector and civil society, to raise awareness among the actors linked directly and indirectly to chemical production and use. The objective is the generation of alliances based on green and sustainable chemistry, achieving a common understanding, along with promoting reflection and required action.

A reality that worries us to achieve the goals of green and sustainable chemistry are the most vulnerable actors in the life cycle of chemical substances. Women and younger population face differentiated impacts generated using these products. The need to incorporate a gender and young people's perspective with greater commitment, to understand with more and better arguments the challenges that need to be addressed.

To the extent that an adequate implementation of green and sustainable chemistry is achieved in the international chemical agenda, it will contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, also achieving synergy between the Multilateral Environmental Agreements that address climate change, biodiversity, hunger, energy, the oceans, among others.

Finally, in relation to a sustainable management of plastics and plastic marine litter, this subject represents a priority from an environmental policy perspective. During the last two years we have advanced in our local regulation related to single-use plastics, banning the delivery of plastic bags in the commercial sector and discussing new regulation on other types of plastic goods, as well as a national strategy to face the challenge of marine plastic litter, currently under development. We welcome the initiatives and ideas that may be exchanged at a multilateral level for more ambitious actions for the protection of nature and our marine ecosystems from this type of waste, as a part of the transition to a circular economy.