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Historic UN Summit on Biodiversity sets stage for a global movement toward a green recovery from COVID-19

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New York, 30 September 2020 — Recognizing that the continued deterioration and degradation of the world’s natural ecosystems were having major impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people everywhere, world leaders called for increased resolve to protect biodiversity at the UN today.

A record number of countries - nearly 150 countries and 72 Heads of State and Government - addressed the first ever Summit held on biodiversity to build political momentum towards the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be adopted at COP15 in Kunming, China next year.

The Summit comes on the heels of the Leader’s Pledge on Monday, which saw 74 countries commit to preserving biodiversity, sending “a united signal to step up global ambition for biodiversity and to commit to matching our collective ambition for nature, climate and people with the scale of the crisis at hand.”

“The degradation of local and regional ecosystems, unsustainable agricultural practices, and the exploitation of natural resources, are putting critical pressure on world ecosystems,” said President of the General Assembly Volkan Bozkir, who presided over the Summit. “Clearly, we must heed the lessons we have learned and respect the world in which we live.”

He added, “A green recovery, with an emphasis on protecting biodiversity, can address these concerns, mitigate risks, and build a more sustainable, resilient world. Doing so can help unlock an estimated US\$10 trillion in business opportunities, create 395 million jobs by 2030 and encourage a greener economy.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said biodiversity and ecosystems are essential for human progress and prosperity. “By living in harmony with nature, we can avert the worst impacts of climate change and recharge biodiversity for the benefit of people and the planet.”

“Let me be clear,” he added. “Degradation of nature is not purely an environmental issue. It spans economics, health, social justice and human rights. Neglecting our precious resources can exacerbate geopolitical tensions and conflicts. Yet, too often environmental health is overlooked or downplayed by other government sectors. This Summit is our opportunity to show the world that there is another way. We have to change course and transform our relationship with the natural world.”

In addition to leaders, the Summit heard from HRH Prince Charles, who called for a new “Marshall Plan” or a “blue-green recovery’ and indigenous leaders who, as defenders of biodiversity, spoke about the need to allow indigenous people to use their traditional knowledge to preserve, protect and manage nature.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen said the Summit showed a greater willingness to act. “Today we have seen tremendous commitment to act, invest and drive action for a nature-positive world. We are seeing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to moving conversations on biodiversity, beyond the environment corridors. We are seeing strong momentum towards sealing an ambitious and measurable agreement at the COP15 in Kunming. As we tackle three planetary crises – the nature crisis, the biodiversity crisis, and the pollution and waste crisis—such an Agreement is crucial to reversing the damage already done, and indeed to tackling the risks that lie ahead.”

UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said: “This Summit has as much to do with people as it has to do with nature. It is about people’s dependence on nature, people’s inabilities to see the complexity of nature, and people’s blindness, sometimes greed and ignorance, and the blind spot of economies and economics for so long to recognize the value of ecosystem services. We are coming to a point in history where there is growing awareness that action on biodiversity is inextricably linked with broader human development through the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity

The United Nations Summit on Biodiversity

(<https://www.un.org/pga/75/united-nations-summit-on-biodiversity/>) was convened by the President of the General Assembly on 30 September 2020, at the level of Heads of State and Government under the theme of “*Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development.*”

About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

For more information, please contact:

Keishamaza Rukikaire (<mailto:rukikaire@un.org>), Head of News and Media, UN Environment Programme

Dan Shepard (<mailto:shepard@un.org>), UN Department of Global Communications

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