



**ROYAL NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF  
CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT**

*The Minister*

6 November 2020

**Process going forward regarding a political message from the fifth  
United Nations Environment Assembly in 2021**

Dear UNEA colleagues and friends,

At a time when we would normally be further advanced in the preparations for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly (UNEA-5), due to take place 22-26 in February 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the situation dramatically. As decided by the UNEA bureau at its meeting, 8 October, there will be a short, virtual Assembly in February 2021, which will then be adjourned and reconvened for an in-person meeting in February 2022. This solution has the support of a large majority of Member States.

The emerging consensus is that we will address the most urgent administrative decisions in February 2021 and so avoid any substantive online negotiations. However, there are still differing views among Member States as to the question of a consensual political message from the first part of UNEA-5.

Some Member States have advocated against the adoption of a ministerial declaration in February 2021, on the basis that online substantive negotiations pose a challenge to ensuring meaningful, equitable and inclusive participation for all. Others have underlined that any meeting with ministerial participation, albeit different from a regular session of the UN Environment Assembly, still provides an important opportunity for Environment Ministers to deliver a political message. Both of these arguments are valid, and I do not see them as mutually exclusive.

In my capacity as President of the UN Environment Assembly, I feel a responsibility to ensure that UNEA fulfils its mandate to set the global environmental agenda and provide overarching policy guidance and responses, such as we will need in the post-pandemic recovery. If we are to further establish UNEA as a forum with impact and visibility, it would be very unfortunate if there is three years between the high-level political messages from UNEA-4 and UNEA-5.

On this basis, I therefore recommend the following:

First, I propose to defer consultations on the zero draft ministerial declaration on the overarching theme for UNEA-5 - *Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* – until our preparations for the resumed session, when in-person meetings will hopefully be possible. I will revise the roadmap, as contained in my revised note, dated 16 September 2020, for this process at that point and consult further with the UNEA bureau as part of the preparations for the resumed 2022 session.

Secondly, I also propose to identify a limited number of broad political messages that may be considered for adoption at UNEA-5 part one in February 2021. We could consider how these messages should be formed to enable this document to be distinct from the usual form of a ministerial outcome document as has been the case for the declarations from previous environment assemblies. On this, I would welcome your inputs. I will draft a proposal for discussion at the joint bureau meeting in December. Following this, I will share this proposal with all Member States in advance of an open-ended virtual consultation before the open-ended virtual consultation, which is currently scheduled for the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, so that Member States can provide their feedback in an open and transparent format.

It is our collective responsibility to honour the UN Environment Assembly as the leading global environmental authority that contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. This is no less true in these challenging times. I am convinced that there is scope to seek broad consensus on a limited number of relevant overarching political messages in February 2021, and I count on your support to this end.

Yours sincerely



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Minister of Climate and Environment, Norway

**Ministers responsible for the Environment**  
**Members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives**  
**Representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders accredited to UNEP**