Dear colleagues,

I send you my monthly letter from Brussels where I am holding the High Level Dialogue with the new European Commission focused on deepening our joint collaboration. These conversations will naturally reflect the priorities of the ambitious European Green Deal - climate and biodiversity, circular economy and pollution. And all of this ties back to over a decade of UNEP work on green economy, sustainable consumption and production, and circularity. As we follow these developments, it is important to note that in a few weeks the European Union (EU) will be releasing a new Biodiversity Strategy and a Circular Economy Action Plan. I look forward to deepening our collaboration and working closely with the EU to make the Super Year 2020 a success.

**Limiting temperature rise is not impossible, but requires us to pull out all the stops.**

I was honored to speak to the Committee for Sustainable Development at the French Senate this month. Here I made the point that as we struggle to respond to the relentless pace of extreme events, at this moment in time, we simply have no choice but to take action and pull back from planetary instability and reverse the loss of nature. You can read my speech here.

**UNEP is committed to supporting the IPCC.**

And as we reflect on how to pull back from planetary instability, there are fewer more positive scientific forces than the UNEP and WMO-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which consistently sounds the alarm on the future we face. It is for this reason that I was pleased to speak at the opening of the 52nd session of the IPCC, outlining amongst other things, areas of continued support from UNEP. My speech is online.

I was also encouraged by the addition of an agenda item on joint activities between IPCC and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). This is a very promising step that can go a long way in improving our understanding of the inter-linkages between nature, biodiversity and climate change.

**And we have the beginnings of an agreement on moving forward to celebrate 50 years of UNEP here in Nairobi and 50 years since the Stockholm Conference.**

Prior to briefing the 149th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, I hosted informal consultations with regional and political groups on commemorating UNEP @ 50 and Stockholm +50. Colleagues may recall that UNEA Decision 4/2 mandates us to prepare for this hugely important milestone anniversary while UNGA 73/333 makes reference to 50 years after the Stockholm Conference.

As the host of UNEP and the host of the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment, Kenya and Sweden presented a joint paper in which they proposed and agreed to work together to start the commemoration of UNEP @50 with an event in Nairobi on the occasion of the fifth UN Environment Assembly, to be followed by a UN high-level political meeting in Stockholm in 2022 commemorating Stockholm +50. Kenya
and Sweden see three major asks from the international community for these commemorations: Promoting a more systematic approach to environmental challenges; strengthening UNEP in alignment with the Rio+20 Outcome Document; and accelerating action and implementation of ambitious goals through multilateral environmental agreements. The proposed UN High-level political meeting will require a separate mandate by the UN General Assembly in New York. I look forward to updating you further as these plans take shape.

A big thanks as always to the Governance Affairs office for their stellar efforts in facilitating the consultations prior to the CPR and the successful CPR itself.

Speaking of the CPR, I was truly delighted to host a Planet Unplugged on Ocean Action on the sidelines of the CPR and ahead of another calendar moment this year - the Oceans conference in June. Hosted by Kenya and Portugal, I hope the oceans conference will focus not just on the beauty and awe of our oceans, but on the role of nature below water, in sustaining civilizations, economic growth and indeed our national identities. We had an impressive line-up of speakers including Ambassador Macharia Kamau, Principal Secretary in Kenya’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Francisco Duarte Lopes, Portugal’s Representative to the UN in New York; and Peter Thomson, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Oceans. My thanks to the Oceans Branch in Ecosystems, and colleagues from internal communications for a job well done. Here is the link to the video.

Super Year 2020 begins with meetings on chemicals and migratory species.

We refer to 2020 as the “Super Year for Nature” because this year offers us an opportunity to shine a light on the imperative of protecting nature through a series of key events in which we will raise the profile and the understanding of the role that nature plays in regulating the earth systems, which enable life and livelihoods on our little blue planet.

In this regard, I thank Juliette for leading our delegation to the Third Conference of Parties (COP) to the Bamako Convention in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. The primary objective of this Treaty is to prevent transboundary movement of hazardous waste and chemicals into Africa. In an opinion piece for the Mail and Guardian, I said this is a huge opportunity for Africa to tap into the political will needed to effectively operationalize this Treaty because it is time to send a clear message that the continent is not the dumping ground for everyone else’s hazardous waste and chemicals. My sincere appreciation to the Africa Office for the hard work that went into organizing this successful COP.

My thanks to Joyce for leading our delegation at the 13th COP to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Gandhinagar, India. This was the largest ever gathering at a CMS COP. I was pleased to note that many more migratory species were brought under the ambit of collective conservation through the decisions taken at the COP. This a good outcome because at the end of the day, migratory species speak to the health of our ecosystems and so calls for conservation strategies that go beyond “wildlife policy” to urban systems, national energy and climate policies, to name but a few. Bravo to the small but mighty team at the CMS led by their new Executive Secretary, Amy Fraenkel.

Good progress on negotiations on the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework.

The second meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework met in Rome this past week, to continue the framing of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework. The
negotiations made progress on key elements of draft goals and targets of the framework including on implementation arrangements, accountability and communications. But there remain unresolved issues. New elements were raised that are not reflected in the text of the Convention, which caused complexities not previously raised in the biodiversity context. Discussion was also complex with respect to baselines for area-based targets; capturing sufficiently, access and benefit sharing and resource mobilization across specific targets; and on the overall level of ambition. As is to be expected at this stage in the negotiations, the outcome from the Rome meeting was an elaborated text that captures the various options and perspectives from Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other stakeholders. There is now considerable work to be done to bring these elements together to develop the first full draft of the framework. This will be considered by the third meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group at the end of July/early August. Huge congratulations to our fabulous colleagues from the CBD Secretariat who have worked incredibly hard to pull of this meeting. Not only did they have to switch venue from Kunming, People’s Republic of China to Rome, Italy, but once this switch happened, the team had to deal with the emergence of COVID-19 in Italy. Bravo once more to Elizabeth Mrema and the CBD team! And of course my thanks to Susan Gardener, Neville Ash and the full UNEP team present in Rome supporting the CBD work.

On the sidelines of the OEWG in Rome, UNEP convened a discussion of the Environment Management Group (EMG), co-chaired by UNEP and WHO and with participation from around 20 UN entities. The EMG meeting looked ahead to ensure further contributions from across the UN system to the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, and importantly also agreed to a plan to deliver on its implementation.

**Generation equality is critical for improving environmental outcomes.**

And in this Super Year, we need to also weave in another milestone into our work because 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action which sets out for the world how we must remove the systematic barriers that hold women back from equal participation in all areas of life, whether in public or in private. I was so happy to discuss Generation Equality, a new campaign being launched by UN Women, to address one of humanity’s biggest unfinished tasks i.e. gender equality. I **committed our support** to UN Women Head Phumzile Mlambo who was in Nairobi recently. I look forward to supporting UN Women as we seek to make progress on the women-environment nexus.

**Please listen to the UN Secretary-General on Women and power.**

I was deeply impressed by the [incredible speech](https://www.un.org/en/speeches/detail/2020-01-19/women-power-secretary-general) on “Women and Power” by our Secretary General at New York’s New School. I urge you all to listen to his lecture. It is extraordinarily powerful and places the centrality of women’s empowerment at the core of resolving conflict and violence, tackling the climate crisis, creating inclusive economies, overcoming the digital divide and enhancing political representation.

We still have a long way to journey as a global community, and UNEP is no exception. But I —together with Joyce, the Senior Management Team (SMT) and with everyone’s strong support— am determined to make real strides. Strides in truly mainstreaming gender in our programmatic work. Not as an afterthought, but as a core objective. And strides in gender equality in the workplace. And of course, with zero tolerance for sexual harassment and discrimination. In the context of this last point, let me stress that I will deal decisively and within the full letter of the UN’s zero tolerance policy in response to any reported form of unwanted sexual advances. I trust that I need not say that this becomes all the more egregious in office settings of uneven power between the harasser and the victim. Let me remind you that
each and every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that we have a safe, healthy and supportive office environment that is free from discrimination.

**UNEP voices are unanimous in their feedback.**

As part of the transformation process that I launched some time ago, we heard the voices of more than 400 of our staff that participated in discovery sessions. These voices were unanimous in their joint desire to build a more focused, aligned, effective and impactful UNEP. It was revealing to see that in our own discovery session as the SMT our own assessment mirrors what we have heard from colleagues around the House. Importantly, the SMT also focused on how we can improve our own leadership capabilities, again drawing from the feedback that we have received from you on areas that we need to build on. For those that missed it, you can watch the Townhall on the transformation process [here](#).

Drawing from the feedback received from UNEP staff, I intend to convene a retreat with Member State representatives in March to jointly brainstorm on the contours of the next Medium-Term Strategy (MTS).

In parallel, I urge you to attend one of the cascade sessions being arranged by the Divisions and Regional Offices. Hosted by an SMT member, these are designed to update you with the results and thinking coming out of the retreat. And similarly, I am pleased to mention that a session is being planned with the secretariats of Multilateral Environment Agreement to deepen their engagement in the transformation process.

**Update on sentencing of environmentalists in Iran**

I continue to be deeply disappointed and disheartened by the decision of Iran’s judiciary to uphold the lengthy prison sentences of eight environmentalists, including Niloufar Bayani, our dedicated and highly admired former UNEP colleague. We at UNEP call for clemency and for the release of Niloufar. Here is my previous statement. In this light, I urge everyone to read [The Highest Aspiration, the SG’s Call to Action for Human Rights](#). Here, I take note of the SG’s reference to protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and environmental activists, particularly young people, women and girls.

**I urge all colleagues to prioritize prevention as we face the COVID – 19 outbreak.**

As I indicated in my email, we are ramping up UNEP’s preparedness as COVID-19 (Coronavirus) continues to spread to more countries. I reiterate my call to all of you to prioritize prevention (useful resources can be found [here](#) and [here](#)). The Crisis Management Group, led by Sonja Leighton-Kone, Director of the Corporate Services Division, will continue to provide advice to managers and staff to ensure that we respond appropriately to the emerging situation. I also urge colleagues to follow WHO’s advice and as Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO said to, “rely on science and facts, not stigma and discrimination to get through this outbreak”.

In closing, as we well know, it has been an extraordinary and catastrophic start to 2020 with devastating bushfires in Australia, the warmest January on record since we began keeping records 141 years ago, and [locust invasions in East Africa](#). All of these events point to our continued erosion of the environment on which we rely. But as I said in an [interview with Devex](#), “‘You cannot be in this business and not be an optimist.” And so, I remain optimistic about the year ahead. 😊
With my thanks to all, Inger

Oh and you can always follow what I am up to on twitter: @andersen_inger