

Children and Youth Major Group Statement at the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives 2021

Delivered on: 17 February 2021

Thank you Mr Chair. Dear Member States, Delegates, Colleagues from around the World. I am Christianne Zakour from Trinidad and Tobago, speaking for the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP. We thank you for giving us this opportunity to address the OECPR and share recommendations from the youth constituency.

In conjunction with UNEA-5 and OECPR, we are organising the global Youth Environment Assembly (YEA) taking place virtually. The first segment concluded on the 12th and 13th February, and the next segment will take place from 18-20th later this week. The theme of the Youth Assembly is **Act for Nature, Act with Youth** underscoring the importance of co-leadership and involving the younger generation in the environmental process right from the inception phase.

As the UN Environment heads to its 50th anniversary and the UN has just commemorated its 75th anniversary, we as youth constituency want you to focus attention on substantial political progress, especially given the fact that many of the goals set 50 years ago are still being achieved. Our generation was not born when UNEP was created or when Rio 1992 took place, and yet here we are living with the consequences of decisions made back then. Those that are least responsible for the ecological crisis - including the children of the world - are on the frontlines. And here we are - asking you our rights, and claiming spaces that belong to us.

Celebrating the findings set out in the **2020 Emissions Gap Report**, but not dismissing the grave risks that we face in terms of climate. We are not on track to meet the 1.5 degrees target. We call upon you to revise your Nationally Determined Contributions, adhere to the Land Degradation Neutrality targets and work towards an ambitious post-2020 biodiversity framework later this year. The recovery for COVID19 has to be sustainable, green and also centric and equitable to the needs of the younger generation.

The **Medium Term strategy of UNEP** has laid foundations for coherent actions across climate, pollution and nature. We find it of utmost importance that the first session of UNEA delivers on procedural work, like the MTS and the programme of work, which is crucial to allow for ongoing projects and work of the UNEP Secretariat to continue in an orderly fashion.

We call upon UNEP and its member states to partner with the major groups and stakeholders, including rights holder groups, communities that are under-represented across the programmatic work. - recognizing that Citizen and youth participation is still organised in different ways in different countries.

On Stockholm+50, we welcome the draft paper prepared by the host country and references to youth engagement enshrined in it. The role of sustainable consumption and production and SDG12 needs to be strengthened, we call upon member states to work towards the **post-2022 SCP framework**.

Children and Youth Major Group and Science and Technology Major Group will be leading a UNEP@50 TaskForce to produce a flagship report led by Major Groups called **the UNEP We Want** which will be made available to member states within this year as input to UNEA 5.2 and UNEP@50 commemoration.

Over the course of the Youth Assembly and in the months leading up to UNEA, we have carefully listened to children and youth groups across the world, taking into account their inputs.

We call upon **strengthening** the role of children and youth in the environmental governance spaces, ensuring their voices are heard, crucial support is provided to the youth groups in low and middle income countries which continue to systematically under-represent. In light of this, we call for interested member states to **draft and endorse a resolution on youth engagement** and inter-generational equity in the lead up to UNEA 5.2. It is time to translate our words into action. **Act for Nature. Act with Youth.**

We need to meet **young people where they are**. Children and youth organise in different manners, right from community-based organisations, grassroots movements, to regional and international networks. Meaningful youth engagement has to be mainstreamed across environmental governance. Children and youth are not just your social media retweets or ornaments to tick the box - it is a generation that needs to be empowered. We have made some great strides with the launch of Chemicals Waste Youth Platform, UN Decade Strategy and others. But this is not enough. We are calling upon member states to establish a **Trust Fund on Youth Engagement** to be administered together with the youth constituency - make means of implementation a reality. **Act for Nature. Act with Youth.**

We are also calling upon the **role and mandate of UNEP and UNEA to be strengthened further**. The UN Environment Programme has to be a docking station for the environmental dimension of 2030 Agenda, with a ONE UN approach, driving coherence and strengthening work of MEAs. We want UNEP and UN agencies to divest from taking funding from hydrocarbon and fossil fuel companies, while noting the importance to engage such groups in dialogue.

Dear delegates, we also want to take this opportunity to highlight the need to **ensure safe and protected spaces for young people** to engage peacefully in all aspects of environmental advocacies which includes food security, climate change and wellbeing. We are deeply concerned about inappropriate legal actions that continue to be taken against youth advocates. We need you to ensure safe space for the younger generation. Our advocacies and commitments are towards a better and greener future. Strengthening our statement with, "Building Back Better" what better way to support young people in these trying times than with this.

We congratulate the tremendous leadership demonstrated by madam executive director, UNEP colleagues, UNEA-5 Presidency and member states in convening this meeting. We are making history, and we hope this sets precedent for the inter governmental work to continue virtually.

Finally - as a youth constituency, we are advocating for young people that are not with us, those don't speak perfect English, those that don't go to schools, the young girls that suffer domestic violence, young migrants, young people living in extreme poverty. I quote from a consultation on the UN World Youth Report "I feel powerless, because this crisis is caused by groups I have no influence on" -The solutions are there.

We will end here by saying as a Youth Constituency, we say the successes chalked for our planet and environment as minimal as compared to what needs to be achieved based on voluminous past recommendations. We want you to step up political will and do what is right. **Act for Nature. Act with Youth.**

Thank you

Contact points -

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