



## **Online session of the 5<sup>th</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly**

**22-23 February 2021**

### **Opening statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States**

- Mr. President, Madame Executive Director, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,
- It is my pleasure and honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.
- Allow me to start by congratulating the UNEA Presidency and the Executive Director of UNEP and commending all Member States for standing firm and committed to the organisation of this online session despite the challenging times we are living in. The environment must not be forgotten because of COVID-19.
- As we gather at this digital UNEA, the highest level of global environmental governance, we wish to convey a strong message to the global community on the urgency for decisive action to address the pressing challenges we are all facing today.

- Faced with one of the greatest challenges in generations, humankind's strength and resilience has been put to a test by the pandemic. We all suffer from it, with devastating health and socioeconomic consequences, as well as with harshened environmental threats. But COVID-19 has also offered us the opportunity to revisit the fundamental role of nature and the environment and the need to thrive for sustainability. This is our mission today and will be our mission for tomorrow.
- The world is undergoing changes that affect us all and to which we must provide sustainable, responsible and global responses. More than ever before, it is urgent to work together for an inclusive economic and societal recovery from this global humanitarian crisis, one that takes us closer to a truly green and fair transition.
- UNEP's report "Making peace with Nature", is very clear: 1) Our current development model degrades the Earth's finite capacity to sustain human well-being; 2) So far, we have been unable to meet most of our commitments to limit environmental damage; 3) We need a clear break with current trends of environmental decline if we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Distinguished colleagues, this online session of UNEA must be an example of how, with the right amount of political will and determination from us all, we can move things forward.
- UNEA-5 theme is timely indeed! "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" is not a slogan, it is a necessity. Nature cannot wait. Neither the rest of our pressing environmental and socio-economic challenges. Time is short and 2030 is around the corner.
- The EU and its Member States welcome the decisions recommended for adoption by this Assembly. UNEP's ground breaking Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2025 and the Programme of Work and Budget 2022-2023, take a more

holistic approach and its design supports the Secretary-General's UN reform process for enhanced delivery by the UN on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. It gives clear directions to tackle the environmental crisis with a focus on the need to address the main drivers, first and foremost through much needed transition to a more sustainable consumption and production development model. We stand ready to support its implementation.

- The EU and its Member States further appreciate and support the efforts by the UNEA President to preserve a level of ambition that meets the urgent need to address specific global challenges for the environment and human health, such as waste, chemicals, marine litter and plastics.
- We shall continue our work, however, in the months to come. Crucial environmental summits are ahead of us, including the COPs for the three Rio Conventions. We have an enormous opportunity here to change things around for the better of our Planet and accelerate the action on climate, biodiversity, land, chemicals and waste and sustainable food systems.
- Moreover, we need a global agreement on plastics to tackle the ever pressing problem of plastic pollution. It is our hope that we are able to join forces and launch these important negotiations at the resumed UNEA-5 session next year.
- The EU has embarked on a fundamental change of our economic model that addresses wasteful use of resources and puts nature at the centre while strengthening our resilience. The European Green Deal and its rapid implementation, with the recently adopted European strategies on circular economy, climate neutrality, biodiversity, food systems and chemicals, to mention a few, are a clear testimony of the EU's determination and commitment.
- But we need everybody to join efforts in a global transition to a climate-neutral, resource efficient and circular economy, with a view to also continue

to engage in enhanced international cooperation and strengthen global environmental governance.

- We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the UNEA President, our host country Kenya and UNEP for launching the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNEP, during this virtual session of UNEA-5. We look forward to collaborating in the inter-sessional period leading up to the resumed UNEA-5 to ensure a successful commemoration that honours the achievements of UNEP in the past 50 years.
- Mr. President, Madame Executive Director, this virtual session of the Environment Assembly is only a beginning and a good start for what we must enact urgently in 2021 and the years to come in our Action for Nature. We are looking forward to the resumed in-person UNEA session in February next year to continue the hard work. The UN Secretary-General made it very clear in his address during the launch of UNEP's report “Making Peace with Nature” that 2021 is a “make it or break it year” for Nature, with several upcoming important environmental COPs, followed by the resumed session of UNEA in 2022. Collectively, we must work to take action in the year to come.

Thank you.