

Children and Youth Major Group statement on the Youth Environment Assembly. Adjournment Plenary: 23 Feb 2021

Distinguished delegates, excellencies,

Thank you Mr. President for the floor.

I am Judy from Nairobi - Kenya and I am honoured to speak on behalf of the Children and Youth Major Group.

In the course of 10 days, the youth constituency organised the planet's largest youth-led environmental event - the virtual Youth Environment Assembly.

Thousands of children and youth from more than 170 countries engaged in critical conversations and dialogues, in different thematic and regional contexts. With participation of several member states, UN agencies and institutions, the youth chalked out plans for what a sustainable future means to them;

This event was organised with **zero budgetary support**. With dedicated youth volunteers from all across the world. As we move toward commemorating 50 years of UNEP, we bring you messages from the children and youth of the world.

A message of urgency.

How much more will you negotiate, for how long, and for whom? While wholly respecting the power of intergovernmental spaces, we call upon UNEP and UNEA to move forward as results and impact oriented organizations rather than process oriented ones.

We **welcome** that the CPR based review will now tackle **systemic issues**, and we ask for this to be addressed.

The Making Peace with Nature Report has highlighted how interconnected our planetary emergencies are. And collective solutions they need. This will not happen without participation of major groups, stakeholders and civil society at large.

While UNEA provides an inclusive modality for engagement of major groups and stakeholders, we point out that **several MEAs linked to UNEP** do not.

We call for establishing **A set of principles for meaningful engagement of major groups**, that can serve as a foundation for other environmental processes. We can lead the first draft of this, and invite the Governance Affairs office to work with us.

In the same spirit of collectivism, we strongly call for the strengthening of the **Environmental Management Group** or the EMG. Having heard the voices at our Assembly, the youth constituency wants to establish an **EMG Youth Caucus** - a network that will bring together youth engagement mechanisms of different EMG members. We ask for support from relevant MEAs, secretariat and member states in making this a reality. Act With us. Act with Youth.

The UN system has stood by while **extractive industries have become the yardstick for development**, an excuse to roll back on environmental and social safeguards. But who will pay for the harm to human health and rights caused by climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution? How will you convince reluctant member states amidst us that they must invest now or risk the future?

We call upon UNEP and its linked MEAs and Commissions to divest immediately from taking funding from hydrocarbon, fossil fuel industries and FMCGs responsible for marine pollution - while recognizing the need to have these actors at the table for dialogue. We **remind you that the Private Sector Engagement Policy of UNEP** is up for revision this year; we call upon member states and stakeholders to contribute to this.

We applaud UNEP's dedication to science policy as a foundational sub-programme of the MTS. At the same time, we call on you to make environmental science inclusive and put human rights at its heart, and take into account the voices of the world's most marginalised, traditional and Indigenous knowledge. **Let us make Science inclusive.**

Excellencies, the speed of our action on planetary emergencies has to be faster, while rooted in the **common but differentiated responsibility**. We politely recall that during the last year - it took several months for the lead UN agency on health to accept that masks help prevent COVID19 and that COVID19 is airborne, despite there being scientific conclusions on the same. We cannot afford this kind of delay in climate action.

Excellencies, young people now are the most connected, most scientifically literate, and most environmentally aware generation in human history. As inheritors, we are important stakeholders in the health of the environment and we demand impactful decisions in a sustainable recovery, green transition, circular economy and waste management. **This will not happen through international processes only.** We request member states to **listen to youth in their country, reach out t**

We not only ask you to take action, but to include young people at all stages of policy-setting and implementation. Nothing about us, without us.

As I speak at the virtual session of UNEA-5 today, there are young environmental activists and human rights defenders being threatened and persecuted for their advocacy. We ask all member states, with the utmost urgency, to **recognise the human right to a healthy environment**, and UNEP to use clear, directed language in its texts.

As we speak today, we speak for those whose voices are not heard. We speak for indigenous peoples, rural communities and all those in vulnerable situations who bear the burdens of our irresponsible actions. When peaceful climate advocates are silenced, our communities, our causes and our futures are silenced with them.

Excellencies, let us celebrate the 50th anniversary of UNEP and all its successes. However, **we want to point out something very important**. While we are celebrating and commemorating the 50 years of UNEP, let us **not be in delusion** that we have the next 50 years to solve the existential crises we face today. We do not have time to spare. We have to act immediately, in the next days and months; not in next years. The youth constituency calls upon you to be realistic.

We promised Madam Director and the President last week that we will hold them accountable for our future, and we will do just that.

Act now. For nature, and with youth.

Thank you.