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Intervention
by H.E. Dr. Yasmin Fouad, Minister of Environment
During the Leadership Dialogue of
The Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

His Excellency, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of UNEA 5 and Minister of Environment of Norway,

Her Excellency, Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP

Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you today, in these unprecedented circumstances and challenges, and to share with you my views.

Our meeting today under these exceptional circumstances for the first part of this UNEA session - which adopted urgent and time sensitive procedural and programmatic decisions, as agreed - is a testament to our commitment to the UN Environment Programme and the continuity of its instrumental role in addressing the world's most pressing environmental challenges. We look forward to the resumed session of UNEA in February 2022 when we can reconvene to delve into the substantive decisions in an in-person setting, recognizing the very real limitations of the virtual meeting format for negotiations, which were all too apparent during the just concluded meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR).

I would like to commend the choice for this session's theme: "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" which is very pertinent and timely. Indeed, I believe that the COVID-19 crisis is a call from nature..or rather a wake up call! Therefore, nature and its biodiversity should be at the heart of our policies, measures and actions.

The World is facing enormous challenges. These challenges include protecting and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, reversing global warming, adapting to climate change and enhancing our resilience to natural disasters and emerging infectious diseases and pandemics, providing food to more than 7.8 billion people, enhancing our water, soil and air quality, tackling socio-economic inequality, and dealing with a rapidly expanding urban population.

The coronavirus pandemic has challenged all these with immense impact on health, society and economies. It has changed the lives of the 7.8 billion people in the world prompting governments and citizens to start rethinking how life should be in a new normal.

Our impacts on Earth systems have already begun to negatively impact human health. Apart from the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, recent decades have seen other dramatically destructive novel diseases. Diseases passed from animals to humans are on the rise, as we continue to see

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unprecedented destruction of natural habitats. In addition, climate change is giving pathogens numerous opportunities to colonize new territories and evolve into new forms.

But the root causes and the solutions to the pandemic lie in the very issues that we have been considering in the sustainable development conventions addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation.

Our response to the pandemic, and the way we plan and implement the recovery from its economic and social impacts, can determine whether the world continues on its unsustainable path, or whether we collectively seek a new future, one of living in harmony with nature.

Biodiversity loss, land and ecosystem degradation, and climate change are interconnected and cannot be considered in silos. A coherent approach would ensure that climate change impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems are reduced, and that biodiversity and ecosystems can continue to contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation and to restoration of degraded lands and ecosystems, and to reduction of spread and emergence of infectious diseases.

In light of the multiple crises we face right now, we have incredible opportunity ahead of us in making nature and its biodiversity central to recovery efforts, especially ecosystems based approaches due to their multiple benefits for people and the planet.

Many good examples of ecosystem-based approaches exist and their implementation needs to be promoted. The IUCN/UNEP supported project “Healthy Ecosystems for Rangeland Development (HERD): sustainable rangeland management strategies and practices” in Egypt, is one good example on eco-system based approaches for rangeland management. Rangelands in Egypt provide many important ecosystem services, such as regulating water flows and mitigating climate change, and they secure habitat to important biodiversity. Rangelands’ biodiversity provides the basic productive resources of pastoralism and pastoral resilience depends on protecting and sustainably using that biodiversity. Egypt has vast areas of rangelands within the semi-arid to hyper-arid range. The entire area of Egypt’s rangelands is estimated to be 4 to 10 million of hectares and it is very diverse. Although those areas sustain limited biodiversity compared to other areas, they are high in terms of actual and potential ecosystem services.

At The 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in Sharm el Sheik, in December 2018, well before the COVID-19 crisis, Egypt launched an initiative to strengthen the coherence, interlinkage, to promote a coherent approach for addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and land and ecosystem degradation, which was endorsed and supported by AMCEN 17 held from 14 to 15 November 2019 in Durban, South Africa.

Synergy will promote effective coordination of activities among the implementing institutions at national and local levels. It will also help countries to meet, in synergetic and integrated manner, their objectives and commitments under the three Rio and other conventions, to optimize resource use, streamline operations and increase efficiency.

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A coherent approach would ensure that climate change impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems are reduced, and that biodiversity and ecosystems can contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation and to restoration of degraded lands. In recent years, “ecosystem-based approaches” have gained increasing attention. The concept of an 'ecosystem-based approach' aspires to maintain the natural structure and functioning of ecosystems. Ecosystem-based approaches address the crucial links between climate change, biodiversity, ecosystem services and sustainable resource management, thus it should be the driver for integration and interlinkage.

In this context, I welcome the adoption of an ambitious new Medium Term Strategy for UNEP for the period 2022-2025, which underscores the urgency of the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. In this regard it is imperative to recognize the interlinkages between these three crises, and indeed all environmental challenges, as well as the need to tackle them in an integrated and holistic manner. We count on UNEP’s role in this regard in a manner which leverages its strengths and identifies areas of support to and complementarity with the Multilateral Environmental agreements, in particular the three Rio Conventions tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification/land degradation.

At Sharm el Sheikh Conference, Egypt has also set an ambitious work plan for us leading to COP-15 in China to address these global challenges. A key milestone in addressing these challenges is the development of a Post 2020 Global biodiversity framework. A post 2020 biodiversity framework that if implemented will end the cycle of destruction of the natural world as a major contribution to poverty alleviation and overall sustainable development.

It is expected to guide and support countries to meet, in synergetic and integrated manner, their objectives and commitments under the three Rio conventions, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, among others.

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But if we are to develop a framework that will really be implemented, we will need ambition not only in the goals and targets we set, but also in providing the means of implementation, financial, technological and otherwise, to achieve those goals, and in the mechanisms we put in place to review progress and hold each other accountable.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the tremendous and unprecedented adverse social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on Egypt, like on all other countries, Egypt embraced the approach of Green Recovery, and showed leadership on the regional level, by being the first country in North Africa and the Middle East to issue green bonds to finance renewable energy, sustainable transportation and housing, as well as waste management, as part of Egypt’s efforts in the context of green recovery,

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in what was the region's first sovereign offering of the climate-friendly securities. The issuance was almost 5 times oversubscribed, attracting some USD 3.7 bn worth of orders for the bonds. The bonds will finance the development of Egypt's USD 1.9 bn portfolio of green projects, including clean transportation, renewable energy and sustainable water management.

In the same context of green recovery, Egypt adopted the environmental sustainability criteria, which national investments and projects should meet.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the critical role of international cooperation and global partnership in providing the necessary means of implementation (finance, technology and capacity building) to achieve our goals and to raise ambition.

I thank you.