

Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly - UNEA 5
Written statement of Montenegro at the Leadership Dialogue
„Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building
a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world“

As submitted by Ambassador Slavica Milacic, Permanent representatives of
Montenegro to the UN and other IOs in Geneva

23 February 2021

Distinguished President of UNEA,
Madam Executive Director of the UNEP,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Montenegro welcomes the UNEA-5 theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”, reflecting the need to overcome challenges arising from environmental degradation that poses an existential threat to the world. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID recovery, we need to step up our efforts towards sustainable and smart growth in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals. It is the right time to make every effort to transform the world into a resource-efficient and competitive economy by turning environmental challenges into opportunities in all policy areas and making the transition more just and more inclusive for all.

The environmental dimension plays a critical role in both understanding the origins of the COVID-19 crisis and successfully rebuilding a post-pandemic world, inter alia, by addressing the inadequacy of the global response to the challenges of environmental degradation. The COVID-19 crisis has further demonstrated the importance of achieving the 2030 Agenda, which represents our best existing global roadmap for the future.

The UNEA framework provides a unique platform to empower "the environmental voices" and to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development by offering widely acceptable, flexible, and effective actions and solutions. The UN Environment Program continues to play an irreplaceable role in changing our habits and choices in the process of managing natural, human and social resources, as well as in the production of goods and services. At the same time, we must ensure that our actions do not weaken economic performance but vice versa – that they encourage resource efficiency and productivity, innovation, job creation, environmentally friendly technologies and sustainable consumption and production. This should be achieved primarily by decreasing anthropogenic pressures on natural resources, whilst providing an interface between a healthy environment and healthy people. In addition, the science- policy should be promoted by using science to catalyze action on a global scale.

Being aware of the complexity of the mandate of UNEP, special attention should be paid to further strengthening the UN Environment Program in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and to this end successfully building partnerships within the UN system.

It worth recalling that at UNEA-4 Montenegro stressed the need to ensure measurable positive effects of Ministerial Declaration in Southeast Europe, especially in relation to strengthening the sub-regional presence of the UN Environment Program. Consequently, these needs were addressed in the Work Program and Budget for the biennium 2020–2021. Addressing the

growing challenges of environmental protection and development, whilst making our responses more effective, is impossible unless the sub-regional presence of the UN Environment Program is ensured.

In the face of growing environmental challenges, no one should be left behind. A proactive approach with efficient and effective responses is needed everywhere, all the time, by all of us.

We can achieve our goal of restoring and maintaining a healthy environment only through concerted efforts and shared responsibility, primarily by reducing anthropogenic pressures on natural resources and providing an interface between a healthy environment and healthy people. Against this backdrop, we welcome opportunity to discuss and approve at this meeting the UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2022-2025. We must act with full awareness of our commitments towards achieving the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. To this end, the global community should work together to contribute to addressing the following priority needs:

- Overcoming environmental and health challenges through fostering sustainable and efficient resource management;
- Implementing an integrated life-cycle approach to achieve resource efficiency in key economic sectors as well as low-carbon economies, together with a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to the baseline year;
- Halting the degradation of renewable natural resources, biodiversity, water, air and soil, while enabling efficient management of natural resources as well as efficient use of metallic and non-metallic resources;
- Undertaking innovative actions to support circular economy modalities for waste prevention, reduction, and recycling, as well as product reuse;
- Improving systems and technologies for monitoring the state of the environment;
- Investing in environmental research, education and awareness- raising in the framework of sustainable development.

The adequate responses to these priority needs would have positive impacts on national economies, which are still characterized by inefficient use of resources, especially energy and water, and inefficient waste management, specifically in the current pandemic and post-pandemic world.

Against this background, it worth recalling the important role of UNEA-5 in “providing an opportunity to leverage other strategic ‘nature focused’ objectives, commitments and action plans that underpin the implementation of the UN Decade of Action to deliver the Global Goals, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the post-2020 Framework on Biodiversity, the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.”

It would be also recalled the UNEA-4 Resolution on Implementation and follow up of UNEA resolutions and related activities which establishes a foundation for continuous monitoring of the progress in the implementation of all Assembly resolutions. It also involves the establishment of a monitoring mechanism by which the Member States can track and assess the status of the implementation of previous resolutions and declarations. This is relevant as many of the innovative and sustainable actions that have been agreed and adopted have not yet been applied. Therefore, in defining new visions, activities, and actions, we should not lose sight of those that are aligned with sustainable policies, but yet to be implemented.

Montenegro reiterates its support for further increasing the UNEP's and UNEA's visibility and potentials.

To this end, Montenegro deems it beneficial to raise awareness of the UNEP's position in the architecture of the three pillars of sustainable development, considering nature, climate change and pollution in the broader context of poverty and inequality, and the general well-being of people. At the same time, UNEP should contribute to further strengthening the environmental pillar of sustainable development, and offer widely acceptable, flexible and effective solutions. Aware of the complexity of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must pay special attention to empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality through the environmental dimension. Environmental protection on the one hand and inclusiveness and equality on the other, can and must work together, and remain at the heart of sustainable development priorities. It is also necessary to ensure measurable impacts of activities implemented under the new MTS, in parallel with the development of related strategic objectives, outputs, activities, deliverables, as well as measurable qualitative and quantitative indicators of its performances and expected outcomes.

This year, Montenegro marks the thirtieth anniversary of its declaration as an ecological state, by organizing a series of educational and awareness-raising events, thus also contributing to the promotion of the ecological dimension of sustainable development. These events will be focused on proclamation of the first marine protected areas in Montenegro; cleaning actions, awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of adequate waste management; nature protection and efficient management of protected areas; protection against pollution; sustainable spatial planning and generally sustainable use of natural resources. On this note, we reiterate the important role of UNEP in the post-COVID -19 era, given the significance of the ecological dimension of recovery towards green and sustainable growth and economic development.

I thank you.