



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations

January 13, 2022

H.E. Mr. Espen Barth Eide
Minister of Climate and Environment
UNEA5 President
Postboks 8013 Dep 0030
Oslo, Norway

Your Excellency,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft Ministerial Declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly 5. As a recently accredited organization to the UN Environment Programme, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has a vested interest in “strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” so that we may do our part to protect the planet. Please allow me to share with you some suggestions and additions that would enhance the language of the Declaration and support a more inclusive framework for recovery. The suggested additions to the **DRAFT Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”** are as follows:

We suggest including “faith-based organizations” to the list of relevant stakeholders. It is widely recognized that these groups have assisted in environmental restoration as well as the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith-based organizations also played an integral role at COP26. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to preclude their efforts from the language of the declaration.

22. We commit to pursuing and joining **new and innovative** partnerships across sectors, and engage all relevant **stakeholders**, working with youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and **faith-based organizations**, **local communities**, **business**, **finance** and **science** sectors to develop actions that are nature positive and reverse the persistently negative long term trend for the environment described by recent scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), **the International Resource Panel (IPR)** and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

We also suggest the additions of the following paragraphs:

13b: *The integrity of the natural environment is the shared responsibility of all inhabitants of the Earth.*

14b: *Our mission has motivated us to underline the imperative response to climate change as an international interdisciplinary and interfaith effort.*

16b: *We acknowledge the presence of faith-based groups as a sector of stakeholders and the commitment of faith-based organizations and religions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and an inclusive and sustainable recovery.*

19b: *We recognize that in any nation, the poor are almost always the first to suffer as a result of any general adverse conditions, natural or social, economic or political. The current environmental crisis—anthropogenic climate change, toxic pollution of water sources and soils around the world, ubiquitous damage to the entire ecosystem by microplastics and other contaminants, deforestation, soil erosion, the rapid decline of biological diversity, and so forth—is an incalculable catastrophe for the entire planet and for all terrestrial life.*

23b: *We commit to strengthening the measures set out to protect the most vulnerable against the consequences of industrial waste and general ecological devastation*

All of the aforementioned suggested changes can be found in the enclosed redline version of the Declaration. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and changes in the final declaration. Please know that I am available should you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincere regards,

Rev. Nicolas Kazarian

Protopresbyter Nicolas Kazarian, Ph.D.
Director

DRAFT Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”

(changes compared to the zero draft declaration has been indicated in bold)

1. We, the world’s Ministers for the Environment, have gathered **in Nairobi, Kenya, together with international organizations, major groups and stakeholders** at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, under exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, **with the aim** to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. **We recall the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in June 1972 and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, and its outcome document “The Future We Want”, and reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals and General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.**
3. We are deeply concerned about the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human lives and health, economies and societies, further threatening our ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and are aware that we face **heightened risks of future pandemics and other health threats** if we maintain the current patterns of interaction with nature **and do not take a One Health approach moving forwards.**
4. We recognize that a healthy nature is **required** for sustainable development in all its dimensions, and that **the wellbeing of humanity** depends on nature, and **on** the services it provides for poverty eradication, resilience, our health, economy and ultimately our existence.
5. We note **therefore** with profound concern **that nature is facing severe pressures from human activities**, and stress the urgent need to halt the global decline and fragmentation of biodiversity and habitats, which is unprecedented in human history, **its main** indirect and direct drivers **being** changes in land and sea use, direct exploitation of organisms, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, climate change, **invasive alien species** and pollution of **ocean and fresh water**, air, and soil.
6. We note with further grave concern that the 2020 goal for the sound management of chemicals, agreed under the Strategic Approach to international Chemicals Management (SAICM), has not been **achieved** with pollution **and adverse effects of chemicals and waste** thus remaining a threat to the environment and our health, **and has been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to increased demand for single-use plastics related to health protection.**
7. We recognize the need for transformative and systemic changes and **for** policies that address several environmental **and societal** challenges simultaneously, **rechanneling financial flows through** innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.
8. We are encouraged by the strength of innovation, knowledge building, and investment in green and sustainable technologies currently taking place which indicate that solutions exist or can be found **that can benefit all countries.**

9. **We welcome the outcomes of COP 26, including adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact, that recognized the critical role of nature in delivering benefits for climate adaptation and mitigation.**
10. **We welcome outcomes of Kunming Declaration from the High-Level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference 2020 (part 1) under the theme “Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth”.**
11. **We welcome and express our support for the upcoming Special Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly [PLACEHOLDER under the theme...] to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, to be held in Nairobi, Kenya on 3-4 March 2022.**
12. **We commit to supporting an inclusive and sustainable recovery, promoting a green and just transition, with the goal of revitalizing our economies and livelihoods, contributing to poverty eradication, by mainstreaming biodiversity, climate and pollution concerns into all policies and tools; making use of green economy pathways that emphasize ecosystem and knowledge-based management, and by reducing carbon and non-carbon greenhouse gas emissions while adapting to climate change in line with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.**
13. **We commit to working across sectors and levels of government, and between governments, to halt the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of ecosystems, focusing on areas of particular importance for biodiversity; sustainable land, sea and water use, effectively managing and designating protected areas and parks, safeguarding especially vulnerable habitats, types of nature and ecosystems, and addressing deforestation, wildlife trafficking, illegal mining, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and other unsustainable activities, crimes and conflicts that have serious impacts on the environment.**

13b. The integrity of the natural environment is the shared responsibility of all inhabitants of the Earth.

14. **We commit to promoting conservation and sustainable use and management of nature and its resources, to advance sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through resource efficiency and circular economy policy approaches, and by applying appropriate valuation of nature and assessment methods of nature-related risks in policymaking.**

14b. Our mission has motivated us to underline the imperative response to climate change as an international interdisciplinary and interfaith effort.

15. **We commit to promoting and strengthening ecosystem based approaches and nature-based solutions, including by actively reducing deforestation and forest degradation, and by protecting, actively conserving, sustainably managing, and restoring degraded land and ecosystems that provide us with food, water, and energy, are habitats for biodiversity and provide carbon storage and sequestration, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, for example natural forests, wetlands, peatlands, mangroves and coral reefs, thus underpinning our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.**
16. **We recognize the importance of the best available science for effective climate action and policymaking and stress the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation, adaptation and finance in this critical decade.**

16b. We acknowledge the presence of faith-based groups as a sector of stakeholders and the commitment of faith-based organizations and religions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and an inclusive and sustainable recovery.

17. We will promote comprehensive land and water use planning backed up by robust national enforcement as an **important** tool for sustainable development and **encourage international cooperation** to help create a conducive business environment that stimulates investments in sustainable production and value chains.

18. We are deeply concerned about the impact of land degradation and droughts, especially in the most vulnerable countries, and recognize that practices that restore land and soil and achieving land degradation neutrality has the potential to bring about positive socioeconomic change, protect ecosystems, and act as an accelerator for achieving several Sustainable Development Goals.

19. We commit to safeguarding life under water, and restoring a clean, healthy, resilient and productive ocean capable of providing food, sustainable livelihoods, and storing carbon, through strengthening efforts to protect, conserve, and sustainably manage our ocean, seas and coastal ecosystems, while acting to prevent pollution, including nitrogen pollution, and increase resilience to climate change, and prevent marine temperature rise, sea level rise and ocean acidification, by keeping our efforts in line with the UNFCCC and the Paris agreement and the Agenda 2030.

19b. We recognize that in any nation, the poor are almost always the first to suffer as a result of any general adverse conditions, natural or social, economic or political. The current environmental crisis—anthropogenic climate change, toxic pollution of water sources and soils around the world, ubiquitous damage to the entire ecosystem by microplastics and other contaminants, deforestation, soil erosion, the rapid decline of biological diversity, and so forth—is an incalculable catastrophe for the entire planet and for all terrestrial life.

20. We maintain our dedication to act in line with the implementation plan towards a pollution-free planet to protect nature and human health from adverse impacts from chemicals and waste and support an ambitious framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

21. [Placeholder for text with reference to recent developments and outcomes on Marine Litter]

22. We commit to pursuing and joining **new and innovative** partnerships across sectors, and engage all relevant **stakeholders**, working with youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, and **faith-based organizations**, local communities, business, finance and science sectors to develop actions that are nature positive and reverse the persistently negative long term trend for the environment described by recent scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the International Resource Panel (IPR) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

23. We commit to cooperating across sectors and levels of governments, in partnership with other governments and local actors and the private sector to transition to sustainable food systems, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and inspired by the UN Food Systems Summit vision of sustainable food systems that deliver enhanced food security and resilience while reducing emissions, biodiversity loss and freshwater use, as an essential solution

to accelerate actions on all the Sustainable Development Goals, and we **welcome the strong engagement** by UNEP in the Summit follow-up processes.

23b. We commit to strengthening the measures set out to protect the most vulnerable against the consequences of industrial waste and general ecological devastation.

24. We reaffirm the continued need to strengthen actions for nature and our commitment towards the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and call for an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption at the 15th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity that inter alia includes a set of clear and robust goals and targets to address the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, as a key instrument to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, **and the 2050 vision of the Convention of Biological Diversity of living in harmony with nature.**
25. We call for the **urgent**, adequate and coherent implementation of the actions, commitments and resolutions adopted by the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly as well as previous UNEA outcomes **addressing the triple planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution**, and further recognize our role, as Ministers of the Environment, in following up on these commitments within our own governments, contributing to coordinated action across sectors and levels of government and promoting effective implementation.
26. We further recognize that the effective implementation of these actions requires enabling and coherent **legal and** policy frameworks at all levels, good governance and law enforcement, to be supported by effective **and urgently mobilized** means of implementation from all sources of finance, including domestic, international, private sector and innovative sources in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as from relevant international environmental agreements, **by** further capacity-building, environmentally sound technologies, dedicated development partnerships, and a renewed and strong commitment to multilateralism **and international solidarity.**
27. We further welcome and express our support for the upcoming international meeting *Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity*, to be held in Stockholm, Sweden, on 2-3 June 2022, to further accelerate the transformation to a sustainable future, and regard this UNEA5 declaration as our input to Stockholm +50 [ref UNGA resolution A/RES/75/280].