



Center for  
Earth Ethics

**UNION**

**Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary**

INPUT ON THE DRAFT OUTLINE DOCUMENT FOR THE MINISTERIAL OUTCOME  
DOCUMENT OF THE 2021 UN ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

January 14, 2022

Dear Excellency

1. The Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary submits its congratulations to UNEA President for this working draft and shares thanks for inviting written submissions to further develop the draft document “Strengthening actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inefficiencies and inequities built into the systems that undergird society from trade to food systems to health care. It should no longer be possible to assume that any of our systems - our indeed any one of us as individuals - live lives that are not intrinsically and deeply intertwined with the entirety of the human family and indeed the natural world.
3. The ongoing climate crisis has been placed in sharp relief as we enter this Decade of Action. Extreme weather events were a defining factor of 2021 and they are predicted to become more frequent and more severe in the coming years. There have been ample opportunities for bold and meaningful action in the last decades that have gone unmet and unrealized. It is a profound moral failure that cannot be repeated and indeed must be remedied. To not do so would demonstrate a tremendous poverty of ambition and courage, and would be a terrible legacy to leave for ourselves and all those to come. We must be clear about the main drivers of the climate crisis and the need to move more aggressively on mitigation.
4. To that end, we strongly encourage language that elucidates the way that governance structures have facilitated a version of global capitalism that relies on imperial and extractionist appropriation of resources, impoverishing ecosystems and the local communities that are enmeshed within them. Without adequately addressing the barriers to equity, justice and sustainability within our current global economic system, we will remain ill equipped to pursue sustainable development in any meaningful way.

5. We support the document's inclusion of the One Health approach and would encourage language that cites the deleterious effects of the profit-driven ethos within our food system that is causing decline in both human and planetary health.
6. We are concerned that the SDGs have been co-opted by interests that drive the climate emergency and use them to shift the focus away from climate. It is no good to take comfort in working towards some other of the 17 goals if we do so in a way that continues to escalate greenhouse gas emissions because that trajectory will wipe out all gains in development, and more. Rather than their intended usage as a uniting set of guideposts, the SDGs are too often cherry-picked and co-opted to push false solutions that benefit business and economic interests at the expense of ecosystems and human health.
7. Therefore, we strongly encourage the UNEA Presidency to explicitly adopt language that discourages the facilitation of reckless self-interest by corporate actors and centers reductions of emissions.
8. We suggest explicit references to the fact that climate change is being driven by the fossil fuel economy - including plastic production - and that we must end fossil fuel usage 7% annually in order to not surpass the 1.5C benchmark set by the Paris Agreement.
9. We strongly encourage language to identify and highlight the reallocation of fossil fuel subsidies - [which eclipsed \\$5.9 trillion in 2020](#) - towards renewable energy projects with an immediate focus on the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions that - because of aggressive efforts by fossil fuel interests - are being undermined by false solutions such as natural gas or biofuels, both of which are proven contributors to the climate crisis, [especially the short term](#).
10. There must be significant emphasis placed on place based, bottom up solutions informed by traditional and Indigenous knowledge, that support local communities and local economies rather than outside governmental or private interests. Traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge should be considered alongside conventional science in determining policy-making, especially where it affects Indigenous territories.
11. We also strongly recommend the recognition of nature as having intrinsic worth rather than being reduced to the category of ecosystem services, which implies that nature and its bounty are exclusively intended for the needs and wants of humanity. We are very much a part of nature and are not the only beneficiaries of a healthy, balanced ecosystem. We have an outsized role in ecosystem health but for many eons, the Earth has operated without humans and if we are not careful, may operate without us again in the coming decades. The development of eco-centric legal approaches that recognize rights of nature and include the recommendation of the addition of ecocide as a crime at the International Criminal Court are appropriate measures to endorse in order to change the perilous trajectory we are on.

12. We support and thank the UNEA Presidency for its bold language that underscores the urgency of the times we are in and the deep need for substantive action. This Decade presents a generational opportunity and indeed mandate to create the economic, social, and behavioral changes required to address the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Sincerely,

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