



Joint Statement by Major Groups and Stakeholders

The UNEP We Want

We, The Global Major Groups and Stakeholders of UNEP and other representatives of global environmental civil society;

Celebrating the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations Environment Programme;

Recalling that, in 1972, it was the People of the Planet that organized global civil society to encourage the international community to establish an institution that would stand as the global environmental authority and push Member States to address crucial environmental challenges;

Recognizing the crucial role that UNEP has played in addressing environmental challenges around the globe together with the Member States, which could not have been possible without the effective engagement of global civil society; and that global civil society is the *sine qua non* behind all that the international community has achieved through UNEP over the last 50 years;

Appreciating the steps that the international community has taken through UNEP to engage with global environmental civil society in our joint efforts to solve pressing environmental problems;

Noting that Major Groups are recognized in Agenda 21 as partners in implementation;

Noting that the Rio+20 Outcome Document “The Future We Want” resulted in the establishment of UNEA, open to all UN Member States;

Noting also the provisions on stakeholder engagement in paragraph 88 of “The Future We Want”;

Concerned that, despite 50 years of success through UNEP, the world still faces enormously complex and daunting environmental crises and emergencies that require all-of-society responses and are now undermining all of life on our shared planetary home;

Noting that Principle 1 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration first gave expression to a “fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being”;

Welcoming that in October 2021 the Human Rights Council acknowledged the Human Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

Taking into account the outcomes of the Survey and Report entitled “The UNEP We Want” aimed at assessing UNEP’s first 50 years and proposing further steps towards a more effective, inclusive and engaged UNEP and UNEA, and the other outcomes of the Major Groups and Stakeholders process on “The UNEP We Want”;

have adopted the following statement:

Looking back at 50 years of UNEP

The last 50 years and particularly the last 20 years have taught us that, while integrating environmental, economic and social considerations into action is necessary, the UN still needs a distinct and strong advocate for the environment as such in all processes at all levels. The more the UNEP Secretariat, UN Member States, Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGS) collaborate, the stronger UNEP will be and so too, its capacity to bring about global change in harmony with Nature.

UNEP as the anchor institution of the United Nations on the environment has had many illustrious achievements in its first 50 years, realized against the odds of its small size, limited resources, and competition with other UN bodies. Those most recognized and appreciated by global civil society include, *inter alia*, its key/strategic role as a factfinder, advocate, convenor, collaborator, administrator, communicator, reinforcer and platform for environmental matters (see Annex).

UNEP/UNEA looking forward

Still, UNEP’s mandate, authority, power, resources, and non-state actor engagement processes, particularly at the national and local levels, are inadequate to meet the goals originally set for it by the international community in 1972.

We believe that UNEP could achieve most in the future through education and public awareness; stakeholder engagement; evidence-based assessments and outlooks; strengthening multilateral environmental law and governance; strengthening the science-policy interface; capacity building of environmental policy implementation on the national level; supporting the development of open source citizen science platforms including funding and capacity building; and developing policy guidance and global standards, all in collaboration and cooperation with the MGS.

Among the areas that MGS see as critical to the achievement of sustainability, in which UNEP, the Member States and non-state actors should work together to make UNEP a more effective anchor institution on the environment, are the following:

- Certain thematic areas including climate change, citizen science, environmental education, the ecosystem based approach, green fiscal policies, blue economy, sustainable consumption and production, the circular economy, the sound management of chemicals, waste and plastics, environmentally motivated subsidies, COVID recovery and development finance, natural resource depletion; the environment, peace and security nexus; and the ongoing strengthening of national and international environmental governance, legislation, law and policy;

- Research and analysis on the systemic root causes and drivers of anthropogenic environmental challenges in order to influence and spark action to tackle these across the UN system;
- Coordination of advocacy and coherent action addressing environmental issues across the UN system, member states and civil society. This includes supporting member states to implement national and international environmental governance and laws and full participation of civil society, including Indigenous Peoples;
- Championing action on the Rio Declaration, essential for international environmental law, particularly the implementation of Rio Principle 10 which is of critical importance to civil society;
- Establishing monitoring and accountability schemes to measure progress in enforcing environmental law and governance at all levels and using this to support member states, with civil society, to implement environmental law (Montevideo);
- Supporting and funding civil society organizations and other non-state actors to participate actively in implementing international goals and agreements, especially Indigenous Peoples, Farmers, Women, and Youth;
- Implementing the policy on "Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders" especially for Indigenous Peoples;
- Strengthening capacities especially in the Global South to gather and use environmental data, and to effectively develop and implement environmental policies and laws, including relevant criminal laws;
- Recognising the contributions that Indigenous Peoples and faith-based organizations make to the transformation of the current global paradigm into a model that gives future generations fresh hope.

We call for UNEP to promote the worldwide dedication of the month of June to diverse activities for restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, such as tree planting and wetland restoration, and for teaching in schools, public lectures, and a marathon for the environment in the spirit of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The first week of every June should be dedicated to an in-depth follow-up of the environmental dimension of the SDGs.

UNEP should recognize the fundamental rights of Nature as a primary underlying principle of environmental law.

Strengthening and upgrading UNEP

The UNEP we want in the next 50 years is the one which will be able to enshrine environmental governance in its work and MEAs. Without a globally accepted governance structure and procedures that allow those affected to access justice, our major environmental problems of climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution will persist for many years. It is the lack of governance and access to justice that is driving these problems.

UNEP should be strengthened through a more effective mandate. UNEP should have greater authority and autonomy within the UN system, a stronger voice in consulting, encouraging and working with other UN agencies, funds and programmes in order to coordinate the further development and alignment of environmental programmes, proactively tackle systemic issues of shared concern, and reduce overlapping mandates and duplication of activities. Better WHO/UNEP coordination on prevention and management of pandemics is a good example.

UNEP should have stable trust fund support and sufficient funding to have the ability to carry out its mandates to serve as a global authoritative voice on the environment. Countries earmarking their voluntary contributions may weaken the overall strategic and normative focus of the organization.

Full transparency should be required on corporate funding of policies and programs by UNEA and UNEP to prevent risks of exposure to conflicts of interest and interference with the intergovernmental processes in advancing the SDGs.

To strengthen national capacities, UNEP needs to continue to help strengthen national environment ministries and authorities to enable them to more effectively carry out their work. Practically more consideration (and resources) need to be dedicated to how compliance and capacity to implement MEAs can be aided by UNEP at national and local levels. This support must include civil society to harness its potential role in delivery, monitoring and reporting.

UNEP should build on its progress by strengthening representation in New York, and by strengthening country-level presence. UNEP should further ensure development of other UN entities by mainstreaming environmental sustainability priorities. In addition, UNEP also needs to ensure that its own Medium Term Strategies (MTS) are shared system-wide, rather than just being an internal strategic instrument.

Indigenous Peoples are crucial for the conservation of biodiversity and their knowledge and livelihood should not be undermined. We cannot put the burden of being the “conservationist of biodiversity” on them as that role may come in conflict with self determination. Therefore UNEP has to recognize the rights of Indigenous People and their contributions on ancestral knowledge, practices and culture. The role of Indigenous Peoples in the conservation effort must be expanded to include other activities like land restoration and land reclamation to accelerate meaningful impacts on ecosystems. Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge, innovations, and practices should be fully recognized. Any bias in favor of corporate science or data should be rebalanced.

Indigenous Peoples are one of the groups that suffers the most in terms of discrimination and socioenvironmental impacts, where projects like mega dams, mining and roads are implemented without taking into account prior and informed consultation as stated in ILO 169. Member States should focus more on recognizing not only indigenous rights, but also the importance and the contributions of Indigeneous Peoples. It is important to recognize Local Communities by underlining their tendency to keep natural environments healthy and supportive of small-scale non-destructive farming.

Member States should commit to strengthen conservation measures that include the maintenance and management of protected areas as a measure of in situ conservation, especially those megadiverse countries where extractivism is reaching the core of preserved ecosystems, species and genetic materials. Unfortunately many protected areas around the world, and especially in developing countries, are being turned into sacrifice zones due to activities like mining, logging, building mega dams, and poaching, resulting in losing not only the beauty of the place but also their genetic resources affecting indigenous and local communities. Furthermore, ecological interests should always be given priority over economic interests.

UNEP should strengthen the science-policy interface, while leading on the use of scientific indicators, in order to trigger and accelerate action towards achieving internationally agreed

multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), UN 2030 Agenda, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, through:

- Better communication: promoting and supporting sound science advice for environmental decision-making; as well as facilitating access to environmental data and information;
- Capacity building by supporting governments to increase their ability to use environmental information in decision-making and action;
- Funding for open source citizen science initiatives;
- Employing a regional approach to the Science-Policy interface which could lead to better results given that the context is key for policy implementation;
- Establishment of structures for regular science-policy dialogues to promote better interaction and coordination between the two communities which could lead to stronger partnerships;
- Resource mobilization aimed at implementing evidence-informed environmental policies;
- Avoidance of conflicts of interest;
- Encouraging, assessing and evaluating the sustainability of innovations;
- Promoting synergies between climate change actions and biodiversity conservation;
- Businesses should promote the reuse, repair and recycle approach of the circular economy;
- Safeguard principles and mechanisms for human rights in general and rights of Indigenous Peoples and their communities in particular; environmental human rights should guide business participation.

There is a need to assess UNEP's impact in terms of fostering resilience, in line with the SDGs and the MEAs and long-term and multi-dimensional results and identify additional structures needed to strengthen this at all levels, especially the local one.

UNEP should address the environmental impacts and human rights aspects related to supply chains in a transparent manner that champions the scale up of sustainable consumption and production, and guides MSs towards national legislation and international cooperation promoting cradle-to-cradle sustainability.

There is scientific proof that rewilding terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is much more effective in restoring carbon sinks than creation of non-natural tree plantations. UNEP must promote and support only those ecosystem based approaches that retain and promote ecosystem integrity.

UNEP should put more resources into supporting the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters on the national level around the world. Application of Principle 10 is one of the best ways to support and protect environmental defenders.

UNEP should address all aspects of environmental equity and justice, including women, youth, and persons who are disproportionately affected by climate change, and those displaced due to decarbonization, and cases where Indigenous Peoples are removed from protected areas without their consent, nor social and ecological justification.

UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments conducted by the Disasters and Conflicts Unit have been transformative in understanding the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts. Disasters and Conflicts has been removed as one of the 7 pillars and now is cross-cutting, which presents a danger of mainstreaming it out of existence. UNEP's work should expand beyond assessments; it could do more on analyzing and mitigating environmental security risks.

The “UNEA We Want”

We call upon the international community to build UNEA further into a convening forum that links all major international environment-related processes and initiatives having significant positive or negative environmental impacts including MEAs.

We call upon UNEA to do more to support the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment on global and national levels. We call upon UNEA to take action to support environmental human rights, the rights established by UNDRIP and UNDROP, and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, on the rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters.

UNEA should take a leadership role in being a principal authority in establishing UN environmental governance and legal frameworks - while respecting indigenous rights and autonomy.

We call for a Framework to be developed to strengthen and enforce environmental governance and law, in the spirit of the outcome document of the UNEA Special Session on UNEP@50, which includes goals, targets, indicators, means of implementation and monitoring schemes. The Framework, based on existing policies and law while integrating the recognition of the Human Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, would support the coordination, implementation and enforcement of international governance and law on the national level.

The Framework should engage all relevant stakeholders at all levels, Member States, the governing and scientific bodies and secretariats of the MEAs, and members of specialized agencies to help in implementing the MEAs and environmental law in an efficient, cooperative and collaborative manner. UNEA should promote the spread of successful MEA mechanisms in which the public has a right to submit communications as a means of supporting compliance.

UNEA should recommend how GEO could be used to support the development and application of such a Framework. UNEP's impact in terms of fostering resilience could be considered as a part of developing the Framework and be based on a Director General's report and/or a special task group established under and by UNEA. We call on UNEA to establish a Working Group to follow up and give recommendations on these matters.

To strengthen UNEP and the relationship between its Member States, we call on UNEA to mandate UNEP to develop a United Nations periodic environmental performance review mechanism, similar in nature to the HRC's UPR or OECD's EPR, which embraces efforts by both governments at all levels and civil society of each Member State, to assess the progress of Member States in implementing their environmental objectives, international environmental law and the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030 at the national level, while ensuring complementarity with the work of treaty bodies.

We call for the formulation of modalities to promote engagement in the quest for a new ecological civilisation.

We call for the establishment of a framework for a new environmental pedagogy that will inform educational curriculum at all levels.

UNEA resolutions could be made more effective and implementable if budgetary analysis could be done in appropriate cases.

UNEP/UNEA Collaborative Participation of Major Groups and other Stakeholders

Non-state actors are among the international community's partners (*sine qua non*) in solving environmental challenges. Major Groups are recognized in Agenda 21 as partners in implementation, with a stake across a broad range of issues pertaining to sustainable development. As highlighted throughout the Rio+20 Outcome Document, *The Future We Want*, we see the value of a distinctive role for MGS across UNEP's entire work program in agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation, while respecting the inter-governmental character of UNEP. The MGS find it very important to work together with UNEP to influence UNEA's and UNEP's agenda and implement UNEA's outcomes through advocacy at all levels, and to strengthen civil society collaborative participation. Though UNEP has continuously upgraded stakeholder engagement throughout the 50 years of its existence there are still challenges that need to be addressed as we move forward.

Given the continued daunting challenges requiring an all-of-society response, we believe that MGS engagement needs to be broadened and deepened, including to provide specialized knowledge in informing policy deliberation and assisting implementation.

We appreciate UNEP's dedication to increase inclusive engagement with MGS and its continuity in improving transparency and governance. However, in the survey mentioned above, it was found that many MGS organizations find it difficult to get involved in UNEP's activities and their input is not adequately considered and included.

We have strongly supported UNEP's efforts to enhance MGS engagement in all its work over time, and we renew our call for UNEP to move towards a forward-looking Policy on Stakeholder Engagement, on the basis of Para. 88 of "The Future We Want" and the Principles on Stakeholder Participation in UNEP agreed by MGS at the 2013 Governing Council meeting.

We note that the multistakeholder governance framework is informed by three components: (a) assessment of Innovation according to sustainability criteria, (b) decentralised governance institution and (c) open, accountable and inclusive processes. Grassroots organizations, with their great importance for local sustainable development, will need special support mechanisms.

In line with Para 88. of *The Future We Want*, we believe that UNEP's stakeholder engagement processes should evolve "best practice" approaches and "new mechanisms" to ensure equitable, active and ongoing engagement (beyond high-level engagements) with all relevant stakeholders. Deliberative processes within both democratic and environmental contexts should be further explored to enhance civil society engagement, particularly at local, national and regional levels, to achieve effective and coherent environmental outcomes. We recognise that such ongoing processes may enable a more representative sample of relevant stakeholders relating to a given environmental problem, such as affected citizens, experts and lay people with pertinent knowledge, and/or non-accredited organizations with intimate understanding of a specific issue. We acknowledge that this in turn has the potential to enhance the legitimacy, accountability and transparency crucial to effective implementation of environmental recommendations or policy outcomes, which will enable UNEP to serve as a collaborator, a catalyst and a coordinator of stakeholder engagement to achieve a broad consensus and subsequent implementation at these levels. UNEP should also build capacity for stakeholder engagement through the development of guidelines for meaningful and equitable participation.

Our experiences with virtual meetings during the pandemic have convinced many of us that it is desirable for the MGS to institute a regular virtual preparatory process, taking into account the severe limitations of internet access in some geographical areas and due to emergencies, disasters and conflicts, and also to avoid conference-related emissions. We concur with previous expert reports that urgent human, technological and participatory capacity-building will be required if we are to successfully harness the digital revolution as a strategic asset for more inclusive, transparent and innovative stakeholder engagement.

However, UNEP should take into account the digital divide, so that the digital revolution helps deliver, not hinder effective environmental action. We request UNEP to work with UN Country Offices to help provide stakeholders at the local level with space/equipment/stable wifi to access UNEP meetings. It is thus essential that the international community provides and ensures equitable and universal access to electricity and the internet in order to ensure adequate participation in governance decision making processes at all levels of governance and to uphold Rio Principle 10 instruments, such as the Aarhus Convention and the Escazú Agreement.

UNEP should establish a fair and balanced mechanism as a stipulation for the timing of its virtual events. It is key that speaking slots for MGS are planned into the digital meeting format in between Member State statements, and that informal spaces for dialogue among Member States, UNEP and MGS, including individual participants, are facilitated.

As MGS we are of the view that by not having permanent representatives in Nairobi our participation through online platforms, while still appreciated and needed, has not been as effective as it should be. Some of these challenges are related to physical presence in Nairobi where meetings of the CPR are taking place on a regular basis. While some MGS representatives have the financial and human resources to participate in Nairobi, many MGS representatives do not, which contributes to imbalance.

It is critical to ensure that UNEP's Programme of Work secures appropriate resources for UNEP and its regional offices to professionally facilitate the continued engagement of MGS. UNEP should conduct an assessment of its experiences in capacity-building for constructive and equitable engagement of the diversity of stakeholders, and develop recommendations on how it can be strengthened, particularly in the implementation of UNEP programmes.

We acknowledge and appreciate UNEP's movement towards self-organization of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, whilst still providing organizational support when requested, taking into account imbalances in capacities and resources. The task of addressing imbalances across the MGS is crucial.

MGS strive to improve their self-organization as well. UNEP should facilitate this by providing support to national, subnational and/or subregional coalitions of environmental NGOs, including through establishment of funded UNEP and MGS Liaison Offices at these levels. This could inter alia raise national-level NGO awareness of the MGSs processes in UNEP and UNEA. UNEP should support small grants programs with monitoring and follow up to build capacity of environmental civil society in countries where it is needed.

The GMGSF in particular should be strengthened as a stand-alone event far in advance of UNEA, in order to be able to strengthen its contribution to the UNEA agenda and for MGS to be better prepared to participate and advocate in UNEA processes.

MGS should not be expected to always develop joint positions through GMGSF with the danger of coming up with the least common denominator position, but UNEA and UNEP should invite the chance to hear more specific MG interventions.

UNEP and UNEA should support language solutions through interpretation at meetings and translation of documents, for a broader range of non-state actors, as well as the deaf and hearing impaired.

The mainstreaming of MGS suggestions and recommendations into official negotiating documents is a serious challenge. Other challenges of concern include access to documents and participation in closed sessions. UNEA should follow the example of SAICM and include MGS representation in the Bureau.

Reading statements and making interventions will become meaningful only when our recommendations or proposals are taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

Annex

Selected UNEP achievements most recognized and appreciated by global civil society

- Increasing awareness of the critical role of the environment for human survival, well-being and development as well as of the impact of anthropogenic activities on the environment which led to progress at national and global levels in tackling environmental challenges.
- Convening power and ability to bring together interested parties to address environmental challenges in a coordinated manner.
- Collaborating with the UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in further developing the relationship between the environment and human rights, including the link between women's rights and environmental protection, including the recent resolution recognizing the universal human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- Capacity to inform and influence policy which led to the raising of environmental issues on the global policy agenda.
- Contributions to building and strengthening the capacity of stakeholders willing to engage in UNEP processes.
- Leading on addressing the environmental impact of armed conflicts through various post-conflict environmental assessments as well as being on the forefront of strengthening the legal protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts, as currently discussed by the International Law Committee's Draft Principles.
- Strengthening global environmental governance through the adoption and implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).
- Generating data, knowledge, and expert reports in close collaboration with academic and research institutions on important matters essential to preserving and restoring a healthy state of the environment, such as GEO assessments .
- Its strong role in the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); the 1985 Vienna Convention and its 1987 Montreal Protocol; the 2012 Minamata Convention.
- Providing secretariat services to coordinate and lead, while welcoming and supporting the participation of civil society, international initiatives organized by the international community

including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the One Planet Network on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the International Resource Panel, the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, the Blue Economy Partnership, and other initiatives and campaigns, such as “One Health,” and fighting plastic pollution.

- Achieving a presence around the world, despite its small budget and often irregular funding, through development of its capacities and its sphere of influence by sharing resources and closely collaborating with other UN Programmes and Specialized Agencies.
- Setting an example of interagency cooperation and chairing the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) providing United Nations system-wide inter-agency coordination related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements.
- Enabling the participation of citizens and their organizations in seeking solutions to global environmental challenges within UN - led processes and initiatives.
- Recalling the UNEA resolution, 'Innovation on biodiversity and land degradation', and other resolutions combating land degradation, collaboration with IPCC, UNCCD and FAO to end land degradation through legal standards informed by science.
- Establishing the Faith for Earth initiative which encourages the promotion of dialogue among all cultures for promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding.