

Honourable President,
Honourable Ministers
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the people and government of the Republic of Kenya for hosting the first special session, convened at the United Nations Environment Programme's headquarters in Nairobi to mark its fiftieth anniversary.

The UN Environment Programme's 50th anniversary comes at a crucial time. It comes as the globe battles the worldwide epidemic of COVID-19 while also striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including the environmental dimension of the SDG. This is compounded by the fact that the globe is in a constant state of crisis, with environmental issues becoming increasingly complicated, endangering all life on our one and only planet. In view of these rising concerns, notably environmental, it is appropriate to reflect on our collective responsibilities, UNEP's role, and the considerable progress it has made at a time when it is marking a half-millennium since its establishment.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNEP, as the UN's lead agency on environmental matters, has made considerable progress in championing the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the successes of the UNEP, in its efforts to coordinate global support for enhancing the state of our shared environment was the creation of the United Nations Environment Assembly. UNEP's capacity to network, coordinate, and conduct robust

scientific research for generating evidence has made it easier for member states to constructively engage and move forward with the global environmental agenda.

As we mark the 50th anniversary of UNEP, it is appropriate to reflect on the successes, challenges and lessons learned over the past half century to ensure that UNEP's original aspirations will be realized through its worldwide presence and influence, especially at the country level, its meaningful support to enhance national institutional capacity, especially in least developed countries; and its unreserved efforts to ensure the active participation of non-state actors at the national level.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we aspire to see change and inspire UNEP to do more, it is important to ask the following question: first, is UNEP well equipped to work with member states to make further progress on addressing existing and emerging significant environmental issues? Second, how will UNEP closely work with its partners and stakeholders at various levels to realize the environmental dimensions of the SDGs? Third, what support will the UNEP need to be responsive to the needs and priorities of member states?

Going forward, UNEP's capacity needs to be strengthened at the national level to enable it to provide support to national environmental institutions, non-state actors and communities.

For example, UNEP could take a lead role in scaling up innovative initiatives such as Ethiopia's Green Legacy Initiative, which has already paved the way for collaborative greening of the East Africa Region by sharing tree and fruit seedlings with neighboring countries.

Furthermore, UNEP needs to support member states to enhance their capacity and capability to comply with and implement international environmental agreements. It also needs to diligently ensure that all of the UNEA's decisions are implemented in an equitable manner.

It is important to note that when collaboration between UNEP and member states is stronger, UNEP will be a strong institution in the service of all member states and

stakeholders. Its position to influence change will also be strengthened by achieving outcomes that are in harmony with nature. This in turn will contribute to reducing poverty, creating jobs, conserving biodiversity, and addressing the impact of climate change and pollution.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude, Ethiopia would like to reiterate the need to bolster UNEP's role as the global environmental authority of the UN. In this regard, it needs to strengthen its Nairobi headquarters in accordance with paragraph 88 of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

I Thank you!