

# Joint MGoS Closing Statement for UNEP@50

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NGO Major Group

Thank you Madame President, and good afternoon, [honorable heads of State,] Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, dear Colleagues, Ladies, Gentlemen, and all Gentlepersons - I represent COARE – The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education, and I have the honor this afternoon to address you on behalf of the nine Major Groups and other Stakeholders.

We would first like to thank the Government of Kenya for its hospitality and generosity in hosting these meetings and in welcoming their delegates.

In some ways, it is hard to believe that fifty years have passed since the inception of the United Nations Environment Programme. In that time, UNEP has made **tremendous** advances for the Environment. The member States of the Environment Assembly, its Observers, and Civil Society have collaborated in ever-increasing ways to help protect our planet, its diversity, and the flora, fauna, and peoples who inhabit it.

Wednesday saw the passage of numerous meaningful declarations and resolutions at UNEA, including one of the greatest gifts possible for UNEP's fiftieth birthday – the adoption of a resolution to **END** plastic pollution, addressing the full lifecycle of plastics. Our collective and individual understanding of plastic pollution and its impacts on the environment, social justice, and human health has evolved greatly over the years, and has led us to this historic event,

This particular resolution was the culmination of several years of work and exemplifies the potential of the power of the multistakeholder dialog. The standing ovation we all witnessed when this resolution was gavelled in is a testament not only to the significance of this achievement, but to our collective and innate desire to truly – **and literally** – change the world.

It is this evolution of understanding that we must embrace and carry with us into the **next** fifty years . . . and beyond. Beyond the 2030 Agenda, and beyond the Sustainable Development Goals. It is crucial that UNEP is a strong advocate for the environment and takes leadership in implementing and enforcing all existing environmental policies and environmental rule of law.

Our challenges will continue to evolve as well, and in order to tackle them most effectively, we would be best served by recognizing and addressing issues early on, *before* they reach the point of urgency.

The fact that some Multilateral Environmental Agreements take so long to negotiate is a simple reflection of the fact that each member and party bears its own priorities and circumstances. However, it is critical to remember that we are **all** interconnected. That our nations comprise our peoples, and our peoples are **nothing** without a healthy environment.

Most often, we consider the health of the environment separately from human health and well-being, when, in fact, they are inextricably intertwined, with exacerbated impacts on Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable populations. Sustainable food systems are also intertwined with all environmental issues, and we call for appreciation of the important contributions of farmers, landless peasants, and others producing food that are under pressure.

Nature is not just something we enjoy on holiday, or somewhere we go when we require a respite from the stressors of daily life. A healthy environment provides the food that nourishes us, the water we drink, and the very air that we breathe. A healthy and safe environment is a human right, a basic need for all living species, including animals.

We must embrace and defend the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, as recognized by the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13.

As leaders, as spokespersons – *and* as humans – we also need to recognize the fundamental rights of Nature as a primary underlying principle of environmental law. We must eschew false solutions and move past mere rhetoric.

We can no longer continue to put profit before planet.  
We can no longer continue to put profit before people.

No one's convenience, and no one's paycheck is more important than the health and resilience of our environment. A healthy environment is the basis that supports all other endeavors and livelihoods.

Turning back to the historic agreement and commitment to begin negotiations of a new legally binding treaty to address the full lifecycle of plastics. . . This marks a new page in the chapter of life on earth. Negotiations will certainly bear challenges, but this formidable step in the right direction inspires us, and gives us hope that meaningful change lies ahead.

All this will not be achieved without the support of civil society, and we stand ready to continue to work collaboratively to face and overcome current and future challenges.

We call for an end to conflict, for peace, and for social and environmental justice.

Let us all dream of and then *create* the changes necessary to improve the world in which we all live. Let us protect, preserve, and **restore** this planet's opulence not only for our children, but for theirs.