

Contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Responses to the questions raised by the President of the Economic and Social Council

a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

UNEA 5 theme on “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” and UNEP@50 on “Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” have much to contribute to the 2022 HLPF on sustainable development and the five Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review also in the context of the COVID-19 recovery. The Ministerial Declaration adopted at UNEA-5, and the Political Declaration adopted at UNEP@50, (both attached) provide strong elements related to the theme of this 2022 HLPF “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated the need for the world to take urgent action to address the environmental crises and strengthen the long term sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from COVID- 19.¹

The pandemic has also shown that strong environmental governance supported by enabling macroeconomic policies can build on science to help catalyse a response required to improving well-being, in general, and the lives of the poor and the vulnerable. Science can and must inform and drive financial, economic and behavioural shifts towards sustainable consumption and production patterns.²

Key opportunities for strengthening actions for nature to achieve the SDGs, including SDGs 14 and 15, highlighted at UNEA also include implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, securing access to information, access to public participation in decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters, and enhanced mobilisation of means of implementation, including resources, capacity-building, technology and partnerships, among others.

b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body.

UNEA 5.2 recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe negative impacts on human health, safety and well-being, as well as severe disruption to societies and economies and a devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, and that the poorest and most vulnerable are the hardest hit by the pandemic.³

The interdependent crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are also causing devastation and strain on health systems, including through the emergence of infectious and noncommunicable diseases and increasing health inequalities.⁴

UNEA called for renewed efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and to keep the ambition regarding environmental protection and means of implementation, including through global partnerships.⁵

¹ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

² Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

⁴ Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health.

⁵ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review.

UNEA has prioritized policies that can have multiplier effects and allow progress in not only the SDGs under review but several SDGs, if not all. The following policies that were agreed to or recognized in UNEA can be highlighted to advance the implementation of the SDGs under in-depth review:

- **Safeguarding life under water and restore a clean, healthy, resilient and productive ocean** by strengthening efforts to protect, conserve and sustainable manage our oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and coastal ecosystems while acting to prevent pollution (including plastic) and sea level rise, ocean warming and acidification.⁶ Enhance the mainstreaming of the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems in policies, particularly those addressing environmental threats caused by increased nutrients, wastewater, marine litter and microplastics.⁷ Address the problem of marine litter and microplastics, prioritizing a whole-life-cycle approach and resource efficiency,⁸ and strengthen global coordination, cooperation and governance to take immediate actions towards the long-term elimination of plastic pollution, in marine and other environments, and of avoiding detriment from plastic pollution to ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them.⁹
- **Promotion and strengthening of nature-based solutions and ecosystem approaches for SDG 14, SDG 15**, as one of the actions that play an essential role in the overall global effort to achieve the SDGs including by addressing effectively and adaptively social, economic and environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, desertification, food security, disaster risks, urban development, water availability, poverty eradication, inequality, unemployment, as well as social and sustainable economic development, human health and a large range of ecosystem services.¹⁰ Nature-based solutions may significantly contribute to climate action, while recognizing the need for analysis including in the long term of their effects and that they do not replace the need for rapid, deep, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions but can improve actions on adaptation, resilience and mitigation to climate change and its impacts.
- **Promotion of innovative, holistic approaches that truly value nature.** Need of transformative and systemic changes and for policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechanneling financial flows through innovative, holistic approaches that truly value nature.¹¹
- **Promotion of the implementation of a One Health approach** in order to better detect, prevent, prepare and respond to health risks, as well as to invest in enhancing the provision of ecosystem services related to health.¹²
- **Enhancing circular economy policies and approaches** to achieving sustainable consumption and production, taking into account national circumstances and capacities, in relevant national and regional strategies and action plans, including those related to relevant multilateral environmental agreements.¹³
- **Ensuing sustainable and resilient infrastructure** by, among others, strengthening frameworks, including for financing, that maintain and enhance ecological connectivity, avoid further fragmentation, and minimize other potential impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods, and also promote natural infrastructure with its broad range of benefits.¹⁴
- **Strengthening environmental governance and foster rule of law** by renewing efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international law and strengthening, where needed, environmental laws, policies and regulatory frameworks at the national, regional and global levels, without reducing the existing levels of environmental protection, and to strengthen capacity across all sectors for the effective implementation of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ UNEA 4/11. Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities.

⁸ Resolution 4/6. Marine plastic litter and microplastics

⁹ Resolution 5/1. End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument.

¹⁰ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development

¹¹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

¹² Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health

¹³ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

¹⁴ Resolution 5/9. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

international environmental law; ensure access to information, access to public participation in decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters and share evidence-based environmental information and raise public awareness regarding critical, persistent and emerging environmental issues.¹⁵

- **Enhancing environmental education and training**, including through UNEP's cooperation with all relevant United Nations bodies, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations University, the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and other international institutions.¹⁶, and the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.
- **Promoting gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls** in environmental governance, recognizing the importance of gender equality, the empowerment of women and the role that women play as managers of natural resources and agents of change in safeguarding the environment and the potential of women's knowledge and collective action to improve resource productivity, enhance ecosystem conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, and create more sustainable, low-carbon food, energy, water and health systems.¹⁷
- **Enhancing the provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation**, including capacity-building, technology and financial support, and to promote global partnerships and North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, in order to support developing countries in the implementation of national environmental policies in the areas in which they require it, and complementing their national efforts, consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.¹⁸ Promote sustainable and innovative financing opportunities and mechanisms to unlock new capital for sustainable investment and upscaling of sustainable business models, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.¹⁹

d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures emanating from UNEA for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda include:

Strengthening measures to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive global recovery including, but not limited to continuing to enhance actions to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²⁰

Mainstream, in a balanced manner, the environmental dimension of sustainable development into national policies, strategies and planning, including but not limited to supporting building of the capacity of relevant authorities, taking into account national circumstances, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²¹

Strengthen the science-policy interface by, among others, promoting the identification and sharing of the best available science to support effective environmental action and policymaking.²²

Promote and strengthen ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, including by reducing deforestation and forest degradation and by protecting, conserving, sustainably managing and restoring degraded land, soil and ecosystems that provide us with food, water and energy, are

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ UNEA 2/3. Investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training.

¹⁷ UNEA 4/17. Promote gender equality, and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance.

¹⁸ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

¹⁹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session.

²⁰ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

²¹ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

²² Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme

habitats for biodiversity, and provide carbon storage and sequestration, thus yielding multiple benefits across the economic, social and environmental domains and underpinning the efforts to achieve the SDGs.²³

Share knowledge and build capacity, especially in developing countries, in the areas of research and development, technological innovation to help improve information knowledge sharing and technical support for an inclusive resilient sustainable recovery.²⁴

Integrate circular economy approaches, taking into account national circumstances and capacities, in relevant national and regional strategies and action plans, including those related to relevant multilateral environmental agreements,²⁵ and encourage partnerships to promote and enhance circular economy approaches as well as business models, innovations and investments to contribute to inter alia sustainable management, use and consumption of natural resources and materials.²⁶

Mainstream and coordinate conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity into sectoral policies and programmes, with a view to preventing against current and future health risks, including disease outbreaks with epidemic and pandemic potential.²⁷

Strengthen links between biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and public health in sectoral policies and in accordance with the One Health approach, in order to better detect, prevent, prepare and respond to health risks, as well as invest in enhancing the provision of ecosystem services related to health, taking into account where appropriate the One Health high level expert panel recommendations.²⁸

Renew efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and strengthen, where needed, environmental laws, policies and regulatory frameworks at the national, regional and global levels, without reducing the existing levels of environmental protection.²⁹

Promote transformative and systemic changes and policies that address several environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously, rechannelling financial flows to serve the attainment of the SDGs through innovative and holistic approaches that truly value nature.³⁰

e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF.

Affirm the indispensable role of the UNEA within the United Nations system as the intergovernmental decision-making body with universal membership, while respecting the independence and respective mandates of multilateral environmental agreements, for enhancing progress in the comprehensive implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, providing overarching policy guidance and strengthening international environmental governance and implementation of the global environmental agenda in line with the document “The Future We Want”.³¹

Reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and, recognizing that we face different challenges, we will strengthen our international cooperation towards the environmental dimension of sustainable development.³²

Welcome:

- the outcomes of the resumed fifth session of the UNEA-5 and UNEP@50, as a meaningful contribution to ensure transformative actions to address the triple crises for our common

²³ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

²⁴ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

²⁵ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Resolution 5/5. Biodiversity and health.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³⁰ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session

³¹ Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

³² Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

environment – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution³³ and towards the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- the outcomes of UNFCCC COP26, including adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact, and the holding of the first part of the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China, under the theme proposed by the host, “Ecological civilization: building a shared future for all life on earth” and call for an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption at the second part of COP15;³⁴
- the Global Assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Working Group I and II contributions to the Sixth Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and taking note of other relevant reports;³⁵
- the UNEA resolutions to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee towards an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution and to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. ³⁶

Recognise:

- that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is important for the enjoyment of human rights and for sustainable development in all its dimensions;³⁷
- the call to end pollution given the resolutions adopted at UNEA-3, UNEA-4 and UNEA-5.2 on this issue;
- that pursuing circular economy approaches as a pathway for achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns can contribute to addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water stress impacts, pollution and human health impacts, thus contributing to meeting relevant goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed environmental goals;³⁸
- the importance of the best available science for effective action and policymaking on climate change, biodiversity and pollution, and stress the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation, adaptation and finance in this critical decade.³⁹

Reaffirm the commitment to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, recognising restoration could bring positive socioeconomic change, protect ecosystems, facilitate climate adaptation and act as an accelerator for achieving several SDGs.

Encourage the rechanneling of financial flows to serve the attainment of sustainable development goals through innovative holistic approaches that truly value nature.⁴⁰

Promote and strengthen nature-based solutions and ecosystems-based approaches, yielding multiple benefits across the economic, social and environmental domains and underpinning our efforts to achieve the SDGs.⁴¹

Call for:

- renewed efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law, and to keep the ambition regarding environmental protection and means of implementation.⁴²
- the enhancement of the provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation, including capacity-building, technology and financial support, and to promote

³³ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

³⁶ Resolution 5/1. End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument, and Resolution 5/8. Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

³⁷ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

³⁸ Resolution 5/11. Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

³⁹ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Resolution 5/3 Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development.

⁴² Political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

global partnerships and North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.⁴³

- the urgent fulfilment of existing financial commitments under various multilateral environmental agreements to assist developing countries and stress the importance of fulfilling relevant pledges.

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Encourage the private sector and multilateral financial institutions to continue to support countries whose economies have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic for a sustainable resilient and inclusive recovery.⁴⁵

Welcome and express 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 on 2 and 3 June 2022 to further accelerate the achievement of the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda and a healthy planet for the prosperity of all.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Resolution 5/10. The environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

⁴⁶ Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.