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Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity

Stockholm, 2 and 3 June 2022

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

General debate**Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity****Concept note****I. The mandate – Stockholm+50 international meeting**

1. The United Nations General Assembly, by its resolution 75/280 of 24 May 2021, decided to convene an international meeting in Stockholm on 2 and 3 June 2022 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the holding of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The General Assembly agreed on the theme of “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity” and decided to organize collaborative and multi-stakeholder leadership dialogues addressing the following themes:

(a) *Leadership dialogue 1*: Reflecting on the urgent need for action to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity for all;

(b) *Leadership dialogue 2*: Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic;

(c) *Leadership dialogue 3*: Accelerating the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

2. The dialogues are expected to contribute to the international meeting by yielding clear and concrete recommendations for action at all levels, including through strengthened cooperation.

3. All relevant stakeholders, including organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, other interested international bodies and non-governmental organizations (including those that have an interest in the field of the environment), civil society organizations, indigenous peoples’ organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector and philanthropic organizations, are invited to participate as observers in the international meeting and its preparatory meeting.

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4. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/326 of 10 September 2021, on modalities for the Stockholm+50 international meeting, the meeting will include an opening segment, four plenary meetings, three leadership dialogues and a closing segment. A preparatory meeting will be held on 28 March 2022 in New York. The United Nations Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session, as well as the first special session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – the UNEP@50 meeting held to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP – have provided input to the international meeting, as they were invited to do in the resolution. In the spirit of resolution 75/326, the international meeting and its preparatory phase are framed around three organizing principles of engagement: intergenerational responsibility, inclusive participation and interconnections, and implementation opportunities.

II. The thematic focus – a healthy planet for the prosperity of all

5. The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, or Stockholm Declaration, adopted on 16 June 1972 by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, was the first document to recognize the interconnections between development, poverty and the environment.¹ Fifty years after the Stockholm conference, with increasing environmental challenges and growing inequality affecting development and well-being, the global community comes together to reflect on the urgent need for action to address these interconnections. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, plastic waste, nitrogen overload, anti-microbial resistance and rising toxicity through reduced and altered ecosystem goods and services are unprecedented challenges for humanity. By harming health, eroding capabilities and limiting present and future development opportunities, these challenges are increasing human insecurity.² Inequality and imbalance are also evident in the use of natural resources, where economic benefits and environmental and social burdens are asymmetrically distributed across countries and regions.³ Adjusted for planetary pressures, few if any countries can deliver high levels of human well-being in a way compatible with sustainable development.⁴ During the period 1990–2014, for example, produced capital grew at an average annual rate of 3.8 per cent, while health- and education-induced human capital grew at a rate of 2.1 per cent. Meanwhile, natural capital decreased at an average annual rate of 0.7 per cent.⁵

6. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the COVID-19 crisis have centre-staged the relationship of human progress and prosperity to a healthy environment. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented economic and social stresses. In 2020, there was a sharp reduction across all three dimensions of the Human Development Index (HDI): health, knowledge and living standards. The crisis continued in 2021, with human development levels (as measured by the COVID-19-adjusted HDI) remaining well below pre-COVID-19 levels.⁶ Global debt has surged, and countries face several financial

¹ The Stockholm Declaration alerted us to the need to act wisely to protect the planet: “A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference, we can cause immense and irreparable damage to the earthly environment on which our lives and well-being depend.”

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Summary for Policymakers of the report *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (2018); Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019); United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People* (2019); United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions* (2019); Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* (2019); International Resource Panel, *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want* (United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi, 2019); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Anthropocene (In)Securities – Reflections on Collective Survival 50 Years after the Stockholm Conference*, E. Löwbrand and M. Mobjörk (eds.), SIPRI Research Report No. 26 (2021).

³ International Resource Panel, *Global Resources Outlook 2019*.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene* (New York, 2020).

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, *Inclusive Wealth Report 2018* (Nairobi, 2018).

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, *2022 Special Report: New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity* (New York, 2022).

and long-term economic risks if this issue is not addressed.⁷ In the 1980s and 1990s, the general understanding was that economy, society and environment were the three legs of society's stool. Today, however, it is clear that unless we tackle the planetary crises, human actions will pull the proverbial rug out from under the feet of both society and the economy, which will result in further distress and insecurity. This insight has sharpened with the lived experience of COVID-19, during which society has learned that an invisible virus can pull that same rug away and thereby halt economic progress, plunge millions into poverty, affect societal stability, and expose poor and emerging economies to high levels of personal and sovereign debt. Planetary and other threats are all leading to a systemic crisis of human development and growing human insecurity – a crisis of food insecurity, displacement, joblessness, inequality and conflict.⁸

7. Science points to the urgent need for a system-wide transformation of socioeconomic systems through policies that change economic and social signalling (such as measures of progress and well-being, true costs of economic products, targeted pro-poor subsidies, sustainable consumption that addresses both under- and over-consumption, circular production practices, investment in education, gender equality and women's rights).⁹ Policies are required to enable countries to increase fiscal space, invest in sustainable infrastructure, rebuild key sectors and value chains, grow green and decent jobs, and align finance and investment in the pandemic recovery with longer-term sustainable and equitable development.

8. Today, humankind has a choice: we can continue down the path of the last 50 years – characterized by unbalanced growth, unequal wealth, and unsustainable consumption and production, resulting in a degrading planet and growing inequity, ill-health, mistrust and hopelessness for the many and a good life for the few – or we can collectively pause and move forward with empathy and solidarity, anticipation and foresight towards collective action for a better future. Building on the outcomes of all the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields – especially the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,¹⁰ Agenda 21,¹¹ the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development¹² and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation) and the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”,¹³ – Stockholm+50 provides us with an opportunity for a collective pause. While it is a commemoration of the 1972 Stockholm Conference, it is also a reflection on the interconnectedness of the health of the planet, equity and collective well-being. It is an opportunity to provoke a collective shift in our reflection by expanding the community of thinkers and voices. It is a renewed commitment to the notion of responsibility embedded in the declaration and documents of the 1972 conference. Most importantly, however, it is a call to accelerate the implementation of commitments in the context of the decade of action and the delivery of sustainable development – including a sustainable, equitable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁷ World Bank, *World Development Report 2022: Finance for an Equitable Recovery* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

⁸ United Nations Development Programme, *2022 Special Report*.

⁹ See the various reports that make the case: United Nations Environment Programme Emissions Gap Reports; International Resource Panel, *Global Resources Outlook 2019*; United Nations Environment Programme, *GEO-6*; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *Summary for Policymakers* (2019); United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Chemicals Outlook II*; P. Dasgupta, *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021); *Making Peace with Nature: A Scientific Blueprint to Tackle the Climate, Biodiversity and Pollution Emergencies* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021) (see also I. Baste and R. Watson, “Tackling the climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies by making peace with nature 50 years after the Stockholm Conference”, *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 73, March 2022); World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, D.C., 2011); United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020*; *Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2021).

¹⁰ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, 1993), resolution 1, annex I.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, annex II.

¹² *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August–4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, 2002), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

¹³ General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

III. The expectation – our responsibility, our opportunity to ensure continued prosperity for all

9. As countries strive to recover and reset from the pandemic and the global lockdown, Stockholm+50 provides a fourfold opportunity to: (a) rebuild relationships of trust for strengthened cooperation and solidarity (including by reimagining our futures together through engagement, knowledge-sharing and learning¹⁴); (b) accelerate the system-wide actions needed to recover and build forward from the pandemic (including through innovative finance for an equitable recovery,¹⁵ mechanisms to address debt through collective action and the creation of fiscal spaces to support just transition pathways to low-carbon, circular, nature-positive and resilient development); (c) connect and build bridges across agendas (drawing together the commitments from the global processes of 2021 and 2022¹⁶ to strengthen the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development); and (d) rethink conceptions and measures of progress and well-being to provide a new compass of collective welfare.

10. Additionally, the meeting offers an opportunity to explore emerging areas in support of a healthy planet. Possible examples include making universal the recently recognized human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment,¹⁷ establishing rights of nature, exploring alternative knowledge systems,¹⁸ adopting a wider “One Health” approach to address issues relating to the human-animal-ecosystem health interface, and recognizing the need to learn from other cultures and paradigms to protect, reciprocate and live in solidarity. As the Secretary-General has pointed out, “humanity’s welfare – and indeed, humanity’s very future – depend on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals”.¹⁹

11. Stockholm+50 opens the way to accelerate action on the 2030 Agenda and to look beyond 2030 to a 50-year timeframe. It will complement the important spaces that have been created for discussing and resolving the climate, nature and pollution challenges posed to development and health. Its central value added goes beyond aggregating the insights and decisions from these political processes: Stockholm+50 represents a chance to think and act beyond the silos of individual challenges towards a systemic approach – one that builds on existing initiatives and agreements and takes them one step forward (recognizing the different capacities and circumstances of nations). It offers an opportunity to mark a milestone in how we conceive and deliver on human well-being, capabilities and freedoms by focusing on the needs of humankind in the twenty-first century.

12. The overarching focus of the leadership dialogues will be on the implementation of tangible, value-added actions and deliverables toward a healthy planet, a sustainable and equitable recovery from COVID-19 and achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Intended for Governments and non-State actors, they will aim to reduce gender-based, income-based and other forms of inequality and especially benefit poor and vulnerable groups. The leadership dialogues are expected to establish the time frame for ambition beyond the 2030 Agenda and, through this lens, identify the most urgent actions to put the world on a pathway to realizing longer-term ambitions. They will also aim to align Stockholm+50 and the decade of action with ongoing discussions on stewarding and addressing the health of the planet. Through their engagement, children and young people can provide a contemporary interpretation of and commitment to the principles of the Stockholm Declaration, and, in turn, the outcomes of Stockholm+50 can be framed as a promise to future generations.

13. The leadership dialogues will also inform follow-up activities in the wake of the international meeting, including the possible launch of legacy initiatives designed to assist countries in accelerating progress on sustainable development priorities that contribute to a healthy planet for the prosperity for all. Summaries of the leadership dialogues will be included in the report of the international meeting.

¹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris, 2021).

¹⁵ World Bank, *World Development Report 2022*.

¹⁶ On food, energy, climate, biodiversity, chemicals, pollution, oceans, reforestation and financing.

¹⁷ See Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

¹⁸ Recalling the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972, also a child of Stockholm, and the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage.

¹⁹ *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General* (United Nations, New York, 2021).

14. Our generation has inherited an Earth that is rich with possibilities. Never before have knowledge and technology opened so many possibilities to so many, delivering innovations and progress unimaginable to previous generations. Yet with these opportunities comes increased responsibility – responsibility to care for the Earth, which sustains life, and to ensure that prosperity reaches and is shared by all. The next 50 years will be crucial for finding that balance. Solidarity and collective action are essential for success, and the recommendations and messages that emerge from Stockholm+50 have an opportunity to mark a historic milestone on the journey.
