

**Opening Statement by Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura  
UN Under-Secretary-General and Director-General  
of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON)**

**at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly  
(UNEA-6)**

**Monday, 26 February 2022 - 10:00 AM EAT (CR-2)**

Your Excellency Dr. Leila Benali, President of the United Nations Environment Assembly and Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development of Morocco;

Honorable Roselinda Soipan Tuya, Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, Kenya;

My colleague, sister and friend, Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);

Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, United Nations colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen - a very good morning to you all. On behalf of the United Nations family in Kenya, I am honoured to welcome you this morning to the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) – the only UN headquarters in Africa and the Global South, and the global headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme, and to this Sixth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

The Sixth Session of UNEA is one of the most important forums for environmental multilateralism. As the world's highest-level decision-making body for environmental matters with a universal membership of all 193 Member States, UNEA sets the global environmental agenda. It provides policy guidance, defining policy responses to global environmental challenges, and is a forum for policy review, dialogue,

and experiential exchanges, based on which partnerships are forged for achieving environmental goals. This year, I am informed the Assembly is placing a significant focus on increasing targeted, coordinated action amongst many Multilateral Environmental Agreements and instruments.

We all know that despite deep geopolitical divisions, countries around the world continue to collaborate on the planet's most pressing environmental problems. As we look to 2024 and beyond, the international community must turn its attention to delivering on the many goals and targets agreed. In tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and of pollution and waste, there is only one way to deliver – action, action, action! Action that embeds environmental concerns in every facet of our existence, in every ministry and industry, in every governmental policy and even down to every household, as the key to sustainable development, peace, health and progress.

Our hope for UNEA-6 is that it will ensure a whole-of-society approach to leave no one behind, unite the world under the banner of environmental action, focus minds, energies, and synergies on key solutions, and guide the work of UNEP in this critical period for people and planet.

Excellencies, UN colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, my attention has been drawn to the challenges you have encountered with our conferencing equipment and facilities which we are working daily to address as best as possible. I am sure you are all aware that our existing conference facilities are over 30 years old and will also agree with me that they are no longer fit for purpose for the scale and complexity of meetings held by UNEP and UN Habitat at their global Headquarters. Within the last few years, the Secretary General has been presenting to the General Assembly (GA) annual reports to address the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. I am very happy to inform you that at

its 78<sup>th</sup> session in December 2022, the GA approved the financing of this project, with a desired capacity to accommodate up to 9000 delegates in formal rooms from the present 2000.

The proposed conference facility upgrade project is expected to include considerations for multi-lateral meeting spaces, accessibility, and interpretation in all UN official languages. The anticipated completion date is 2030 at a maximum cost of US\$267.5 million. It is going to be the single largest capital infrastructure project undertaken by UNON and the biggest infrastructure project the United Nations Secretariat has undertaken in Africa since its inception. We have awarded the design services to an international consortium led by a South African firm with a Kenyan partner and a Swiss design consultant. I want to thank all the Members States, who have supported us to get this approval.

We intend to produce, in the coming months, a compendium of potential donor opportunities once the design phase progresses and details of the design and related donor opportunities become available. During our initial discussions with the consulting firm, we agreed that the concept design will feature several prominent buildings and interior spaces that could be ideal opportunities for donations or in-kind contributions by Member States or private donors, including a visitors' entry pavilion and visitors' center, delegates dining building, media center, multifunctional pavilion, conference and meeting room interiors, lounges and works of art. I look forward to working with you all on this.

Let me conclude my statement this morning by sharing with you all, our journey of how UNON has actively been 'walking-the-talk' to integrate environmental sustainability, here at the UN Gigiri complex.

In 2019, we officially launched our Environmental Policy Statement, which can be seen on display within the Gigiri complex. This policy commits UNON and all its personnel and operations to stewardship and

protection of the environment and strives towards the approach of a fully integrated Environmental Management System and ISO 14001:2015 environmental certification. I like to call this part the 'DNA' of our operations, focusing on the facilities related areas of energy, water, wastewater and waste management, emissions reductions and biodiversity. In the spirit of continuous improvement, UNON has continued to identify specific opportunities to reduce the environmental footprint of the UN's activities.

Our first special milestone was in 2022 when we completed our first potential net-zero building equipped with solar panels sized to generate at a minimum the equivalent of the total energy consumed by the building throughout the year. This was followed in 2023 with the start of construction works on our US\$22M new office facilities capital construction project, which includes amongst others, a declared design intent to be net-zero energy.

Other milestones so far include introduction of a new construction waste management plan to support an established office waste separation and management program which routinely recycles over 90% of office waste generated, and the more recent launch of an electric vehicle fleet service to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to provide a more sustainable means for shorter distance urban travel within the Nairobi environs, to all UN entities at the UN Gigiri complex.

The Secretary-General in May last year launched our complex-wide reforestation strategy in which we plan to restore the original dry upland forest environment in our UN Gigiri complex. We have already planted over 2,000 out of a planned 3,000-plus indigenous biodiversity supporting tree species, which can be seen as you walk around the complex.

In 2024, our environmental sustainability efforts will be focused on retrofitting the existing UNEP buildings with new solar panels, to support what aims to be a net-zero energy UNEP headquarters building. We have

made a commitment to arrive at net zero for our complex by 2030, with a stronger commitment for our conference facility project to be net zero.

Finally, I am pleased to report that our efforts towards environmental sustainability at our Gigiri complex culminated in the award to UNON of ISO 14001:2015 environmental certification as of 26 January 2023. We are the first and only UN Headquarter office that has so far achieved this certification.

I would like to invite you all to view our exhibition on the upper concourse, to take a walk within what we like to call our 'indoor-outdoor' work environment, and to learn more about environmental sustainability efforts here at the UN Gigiri complex.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleague, friend and sister Inger Anderson – ED of UNEP who has systematically transformed us all in this beautiful complex into enthusiastic environmentalists. Without her continuous encouragement and support, we could not have been able to do all we have done and proudly achieve so much.

I thank you all for your presence here today in this historic Assembly and wish you the most successful of deliberations.

*Asanteni sana.*