



Check against delivery

UN Environmental Assembly

MEA Day Keynote

Nairobi, 28 February 2024

Madame President,

Excellencies, Ministers,

Dear UNEP Executive Director,

Honorable Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to start by thanking the President of UNEA and the Executive Director of UNEP for dedicating an entire day of UNEA6 to the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This is a real credit to UNEP. UNEA is one of the important platforms to discuss these issues.

Thirty years after the signing of the Rio conventions, and fifty years after the creation of some of the MEAs represented here, we must face the facts: the implementation of these treaties cannot be done in silos.

We cannot be effective if the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Even less so if all the work done by the national focal point for one convention is ignored, or worse,



brushed aside by another focal point. Putting things in order therefore begins at home, at the national level. International partners and development agencies, where appropriate, should play their part. MEA secretariat should help engineer cooperation and technical support.

In this respect, institutions such as UNEP and Assemblies such as UNEA have a historic responsibility and a critical role to play in harmonizing the work and focus of the various MEAs as we face a multitude of interconnected crises.

About the triple planetary crisis, indeed we face a climate crisis, a pollution crisis and a nature crisis. I would be remiss, as head of the UNCCD, not to insist that the nature crisis includes the immense crisis of land and drought, which is currently affecting more than 3 billion people, causing food insecurity, water scarcity and forced displacements.

Action on the land is a powerful force for unity.

The health of the land determines the food we eat, the water we drink, the quality of the air we breathe, the clothes we wear and many other services that contribute to our well-being. But the damage we inflict on our land poses a serious threat to world peace, and to the global economy.

The good news is that there are solutions to these serious problems. They are well within our reach and this is literally in our hands.

Make no mistake: the best solutions are those that tackle several challenges at once.

We must slow down and adapt to climate change, protect and restore nature and biodiversity, reverse land degradation and



desertification, and end pollution and waste. We don't have the luxury of dedicating Monday to climate or pollution, Tuesday to biodiversity and only think that we can wait until Wednesday to tackle Land degradation. These issues are like communicating vessels and we have to address all these challenges at once!

The scientific community is increasingly moving from sounding the alarm to signposting solutions that require concerted efforts. However, progress on turning commitments into transformative action must accelerate. Rapidly. Coherently. Consistently.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

2024 represents a new opportunity for us all: The three Rio conventions will hold their COPs consecutively at the end of this year. We already had a successful CMS COP few days ago.

At the UNCCD COP16 in Saudi Arabia - in December – we will embark on a unique journey – one that brings all communities of policy and practice to join forces towards a common goal: that of making land healthy again.

Parties assembled in Riyadh at UNCCD COP16 will present a groundbreaking action agenda for all MEAs to reverse degradation and to accelerate efforts to restore 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030.

Healthy and productive land is the operational link between climate action and biodiversity conservation.

Linking up action on land will allow us to take advantage of the synergies that build resilience, mitigate the impacts of climate change, safeguard biodiversity, provide food security for



billions around the world, and transform the way we manage the environment and consume its bounty.

And this is everyone's effort. We must ensure that the work on each MEA commitment dovetails with and amplifies the work of the others. By forging synergies with UN entities and conventions, we can amplify our impact, leverage resources, and foster greater coherence in our collective response to global environmental challenges.

For example: aligning land degradation neutrality targets with nationally determined contributions and the new biodiversity targets can maximize the impact of nature-positive investments and significantly diminish the huge gap between commitment and action.

After all, we are facing one single global challenge – the sustainability of the planet and striving for an environment of peace and prosperity.

While MEA have individual mandates, they ultimately have the same ambition: protecting the people and the planet.

Let us make 2024 a pivotal year for environmental multilateralism. The science is clear and sobering. Long-term planning and cooperation are of the essence. But urgent action is needed.

Recent years have proven that environmental multilateralism is working. It remains our best shot at tackling the complex and interconnected environmental challenges. Let's take it!