

Opening Remarks of the UNEA President, H.E: Ms. Leila Benali

*High level opening of the 6th session of the UN Environment Assembly
UNEA-6*

Thursday, 29 February 2024, 09:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

United Nations Office in Nairobi

*Excellency Dr William Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya and
Commander-in-Chief of the Kenya Defence Forces*

*Excellency Dennis Francis, President of the 78th session of the United Nations
General Assembly*

*Excellency Paula Narváez, President of the United Nations Economic and Social
Council*

*Excellency Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations
Environment Programme*

*Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

All protocol observed.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, hosted in Nairobi, the home of the United Nations Environment Programme for over 50 years.

Marhaba, Bienvenue, bienvenido and Karibu

Another Swahili word I learnt during my visit to Karura to plant trees, thanks to the exceptional leadership of President Dr. William Ruto and First Lady Rachel Ruto on environment and ecosystem restoration, is Mazingira (Environment)

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

We take pride in the progress made on the global environmental agenda, but we know that we are fast reaching the point of no return – where human progress is at risk.

In many areas of the world, the point of no return was already reached, as 3.2 billion people or 40 % of the world's population are suffering from ecosystem degradation requiring Immediate action.

We are here to ensure that multilateralism is strengthened to deliver solutions critical to tackling the planetary environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and their side effects of desertification, ecosystems degradation and droughts.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Let me say a few words about environmental multilateralism

In 2024, we have many reasons to be distracted from our mission of putting the world on a sustainable development path, since we are all facing 3 inflection points wherever we live.

In 2024 there are at least 2 major armed conflicts, in Europe and the Middle East, with global geopolitical, economic and social implications that are felt in every part of the world. That is inflection point 1.

The 2nd inflection that might be distracting us as politicians and policymakers is that 40 % of the world's population is electing its leaders this year, leaders that might change or even reverse sustainability policies and achievements

And Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

the 3rd inflection point in 2024 is that the Multilateral system is under unprecedented pressure, to say the least

That is why UNEA6, the highest- level multilateral decision making body on Environmental issues, gathering in 2024, is critical.

We are here at UNEA 6 to consolidate the achievements of our predecessors and to stay focused on our mission.

We are here because we firmly believe in multilateral cooperation and international solidarity.

My deep appreciation to UNEP for supporting Member States, and helping us stay focused on our mission, at this critical time.

My most sincere appreciation to UNEP Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, and her team for their unwavering commitment to steer global efforts to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development goals.

— — —

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Yes, the multilateral system is under unprecedented pressure.

And yes, we can rise to the challenge and deliver.

HM King Mohammed 6 MGAI in his message to CoP28 Dubai emphasized this urgency: **quote and quote** “The IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings held in Marrakesh concluded that there was a pressing need to reform multilateralism and development financing, two levers humanity came up with to meet the challenges of the 20th century - two levers in which we believe. It is that conviction which is motivating my country as President of the United Nations Environment Assembly. **Unquote – end of His Majesty’s statement**

This Assembly focuses on addressing threats to species and ecosystems, and threats to Our air, our soil, and our waters.

This Assembly is about committing to decisive actions and credible solutions. In 2024, We have no choice but to act faster and with greater ambition.

Environmental threats are disproportionately affecting some communities more than others.

Science tells us that the impacts we face are worsening.

Last year was the hottest on record. Catastrophic events such as raging storms, terrible droughts and devastating wildfires are becoming the new normal.

But we have the solutions, in our nature, in technologies, in innovations, and in finance, and we know what is possible when we come together armed with ambition, with an open mind and with unity.

Because multilateralism works. One great example is the negotiations underway on a global treaty to end plastic pollution. This was a key outcome of the previous Assembly that is only possible to implement if we stop the blame game and the finger pointing.

We have the opportunity to leave our mark this year too, in committing to ambitious action on a range of environmental challenges.

We must drive inclusive and multilateral action and focus our energy on key and credible solutions.

And the good news is that we have examples from around the world, that we can emulate, from governments, enterprises, youth, civil society, local communities that we can use to protect environmental health, human health and human lives.

We are convinced that the promise of revamping environmental multilateralism, during this UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration cannot be delivered without a coordinated effort between the UN system and the most driven, the most enlightened leadership from the private and public sectors, with cutting edge technologies, investments in R&D, with innovative funding expertise and with sustainable engagement with local communities .

That is why I have taken the initiative to put together a group of like-minded purpose driven leaders who share the personal sense of urgency to advance environmental multilateralism and to align financial flows with science and sustainability.

These leaders pledge to coordinate with the UN system to build a deeper engagement from industry and I have addressed a letter to His Excellency UN Secretary General, so this group could form the Alliance of Goodwill Environmentalists and could possibly act as a much needed support for upcoming UNEA's presidencies, including from the Global South.

— — —

Excellencies , Dear Colleagues,

As President of this Assembly, my vision is to scale-up efforts to overcome our challenges.

We must pragmatically look at what we know works and scale that up, faster and better.

We must nurture what unites us, and build on the synergies between the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other multilateral agencies.

But I also believe given the fast pace of innovation that we must stay curious regarding solutions that are yet to be proven, so that we can take, as policy makers, informed and science-based decisions at the right time.

Action, credibility and implementation at all levels, is the only way for the resolutions adopted by this Assembly to help us build the roadmap we want for the environment and sustainable development.

We are on the verge, Excellencies and dear colleagues, of agreeing to elevate action to tackle all forms of pollution, and to speed up implementation of the hard-won Global Framework on Chemicals.

We need greater cooperation to ensure a just and sustainable energy transition, a transition that seeks to achieve an energy-secure future for all, while respecting local and national needs, including when it comes to inflation, poverty and debt sustainability.

And we must deploy greater efforts: to enhance sustainable mining, to incorporate land degradation, desertification and drought into disaster risk management, to achieve gender equality and to empower youth and children because, after all, we are doing this for them.

And let's ensure that our actions will be truly & credibly leaving no one behind.

Excellencies, dear colleagues

It is my hope that this Environment Assembly will demonstrate that challenges are best addressed when the community of nations and citizens of the world join forces with an open mind.

Our efforts today will be crucial to secure our world – for the benefit of our people and our planet.

— — —
I continue to count on your commitment and look forward to working with you at this United Nations Environment Assembly to deliver on the expectations of the international community, and of our people.

Thank you.