

**Opening remarks**

**Third session of the ad hoc Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG-3) of the Science-Policy Panel on chemicals, waste and prevention of pollution**

**Organizer: UNEP**

**Geneva, Switzerland**

**17 June 2024**

Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group Gudi Alkemade

Executive Director Inger Andersen,

Katrin Schneeberger, Director of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues and friends,

Good morning, and my thanks to my sister Inger and your colleagues at UNEP for the opportunity to address you today.

I was honoured to join you in Nairobi at the UN Environment Assembly in February.

The Assembly adopted important resolutions on air pollution and climate change, as well as the new framework on chemicals, all of which provide an important supporting context for this working group.

Just a few weeks ago we had our own World Health Assembly here in Geneva.

Our Member States adopted the 14<sup>th</sup> General Programme of Work – our global strategy for the next four years.

One of its three key priorities is to promote health and prevent disease, by addressing its root causes – including in the environment.

Globally, nearly one in four deaths are linked to environmental conditions;

And chemicals, waste and pollution are among the leading culprits.

Low- and middle-income countries bear the greatest disease burden.

And the situation is only getting worse.

Building healthier environments therefore holds huge potential to protect the health of both people and planet.

For this reason, WHO supports the establishment of a science-policy panel to foster the action needed to reverse current trends and implement evidence-based solutions.

WHO is committed to participating in the science-policy panel, and to collaborating with UNEP and other partners to put science at the core of global decision-making.

In discussions with my sister Inger, I have confirmed my commitment to developing a proposal for a Joint WHO-UNEP secretariat, building on the strengths of both organizations.

In addition to the IPCC and IPBES, the Science-Policy Panel will provide an important third pillar in the response to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and chemicals, waste and pollution.

I thank the Working Group for your hard work so far, and I wish you every success in this third meeting as you finalize preparations for the forthcoming intergovernmental meeting.

From our side, we urge the panel to adopt a strategic approach that strengthens Member State collaboration;

That fosters multisectoral engagement;

That uses science, research and innovation to drive progress;

That complements and builds on the work of WHO and other scientific organizations;

That works across disciplines;

That engages with both the public and private sectors;

And that focuses on prevention.

Thank you all once again for your commitment to harnessing the power of science to shape the policies that can save lives from chemicals, waste and pollution.

I wish you every success in completing your negotiations this week in laying the foundations for the science-policy panel and its work.

I thank you.