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Honourable Excellency, H.E. Dr. Abdullah Bin Ali Al-Amri,
President of the United Nations Environment Assembly,

The Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the important discussions surrounding the draft Ministerial Declaration for the Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7). As stewards of the natural world, we are deeply committed to advancing sustainable solutions that will ensure the resilience of our planet's ecosystems. We are honoured to engage in this process and offer our insights in the pursuit of a sustainable future, where the balance between humanity and nature is restored and strengthened.

What would the Ministers for the Environment propose as the most important element and or key messages that would enable the ministerial declaration to take forward the UNEA theme in the most impactful manner?

The UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration must urgently address the unprecedented biodiversity crisis we face, as it is intrinsically linked to the health of our planet. The rapid loss of species, particularly in the face of the Holocene extinction, driven by anthropogenic forces such as global warming, overconsumption, and habitat destruction, demands immediate, coordinated action. To this end, ministers must prioritize several key areas:

1. **Protecting Ecosystems as a Cornerstone of Climate Resilience:** Healthy ecosystems are our natural infrastructure—regulating climate, pollinating crops, and enriching soil. Preserving biodiversity must be central to any climate mitigation or adaptation strategy. Governments must invest in protecting critical ecosystems, including temperate grasslands, which the IUCN has declared the most endangered ecosystem.
2. **Urgency in Species Protection and Recovery:** Laws designed to protect endangered species are failing to halt their decline. Ministers should call for the implementation of enforceable actions and deadlines within species recovery plans, ensuring they are not just consultative but result in tangible, on-the-ground protection efforts.
3. **Addressing the Silent Crisis of Insect Decline:** The collapse of insect populations is a clear indicator of broader ecosystem failure. Insects, essential for pollination, decomposition, and maintaining ecological balance, are in freefall. Action must be taken to curb pesticide use, habitat loss, and pollution, alongside a global effort to monitor and reverse the alarming decline of insect species.

4. **Incorporating Circular Economy Practices:** Transitioning to a circular economy model can mitigate environmental degradation by reducing resource exploitation, minimizing waste, and promoting sustainability. This would be a proactive step in combating overexploitation, a major driver of habitat loss.
5. **Inclusive and Actionable Biodiversity Governance:** Ministers should advocate for stronger international agreements on biodiversity, ensuring that they are not merely aspirational but are backed by concrete actions. This includes enforcing compliance, increasing funding for biodiversity conservation, and ensuring that policies integrate biodiversity as an essential component of all environmental and economic strategies.

The biodiversity crisis is not a distant concern; it is happening now, with profound implications for humanity. By prioritizing biodiversity protection in the UNEA-7 declaration, we can take decisive action toward a resilient planet. The collapse of nature is not an abstract issue—it is an urgent, existential threat. The time for comprehensive, bold, and action-oriented solutions is now.

What key messages or conclusions from recent scientific reports would the Minister of the Environment recommend for consideration in the ministerial declaration?

Key Messages for UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration

The Minister of the Environment should advocate for urgent and transformative action to address the accelerating biodiversity crisis in the face of the ongoing Holocene extinction, also known as the Anthropocene extinction. Recent scientific reports clearly highlight the devastating impacts of human activities—global warming, deforestation, overconsumption, and pollution—on our ecosystems and species. The following key messages are essential for the ministerial declaration:

1. **Protect and Restore Biodiversity as Climate Solution:** Scientific evidence confirms that protecting and restoring biodiversity is a crucial strategy for combating climate change. Intact ecosystems regulate our climate, pollinate crops, purify water, and provide the resources we depend on. Ministers should emphasize the need to protect critical habitats, including temperate grasslands, wetlands, and forests, to safeguard biodiversity and ensure ecosystem services are maintained.
2. **Urgent Action on Species Extinction:** The rapid loss of species must be addressed through enforceable recovery plans, immediate habitat protection, and curbing the drivers of extinction such as land-use change, pollution, and overexploitation. Species such as insects, which are vital for pollination and nutrient cycling, are in catastrophic decline. The UNEA-7 declaration should call for urgent global action to halt these declines and restore ecological balance.
3. **Integrating Biodiversity into All Policy Frameworks:** Biodiversity conservation should be embedded into all sectors, from agriculture and forestry to urban planning and industry. Ministers must call for policy coherence across government levels to ensure

that biodiversity considerations are central to decisions on land use, resource extraction, and development.

4. **Empowering the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards:** The future of our planet depends on the involvement of youth in driving sustainable solutions. Ministers should prioritize the education and empowerment of young people, fostering a generation of environmental stewards who are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and platforms to tackle pressing challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.
5. **Commitment to Global Cooperation and Action:** The biodiversity crisis is a global challenge requiring collective action. Ministers should emphasize the importance of international collaboration in strengthening biodiversity agreements, increasing financial commitments to conservation, and sharing knowledge and best practices across borders. Additionally, they should stress the need for clear and measurable goals in international biodiversity frameworks to ensure that progress is tracked and achieved.

Bibliography of Recent Scientific Reports:

1. **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).** (2019). *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. IPBES.
2. **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).** (2020). *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. IUCN.
3. **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).** (2021). *State of the Planet's Insects*. UNEP.
4. **Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE).** (2021). *The Global Biodiversity Crisis: Emerging Issues and Challenges*. SCOPE Report.
5. **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).** (2020). *The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: A Roadmap for Action*. CBD.
6. **World Wildlife Fund (WWF).** (2020). *Living Planet Report 2020: Bending the Curve of Biodiversity Loss*. WWF.

What proposed collective actions and policy solutions should the Ministers for the Environment adopt to advance the UNEA theme and promote effective and inclusive environmental governance?

Proposed Collective Actions and Policy Solutions for UNEA-7

To advance the UNEA theme of "Advancing Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Planet," the Ministers for the Environment must adopt collective actions and policy solutions that prioritize ecological regeneration, promote sustainable consumption patterns, and foster effective, inclusive governance. Drawing upon both scientific research and visionary principles from

environmental leaders, the following actions should be central to the UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration:

1. **Shift to Sustainable, Plant-Based Economies:** Richard St. Barbe Baker's call to transition from an "animal economy" to a "silvan economy" must be echoed in the global policy landscape. The ecological burden of animal agriculture is vast, with beef production alone requiring 18 times more land than plant-based crops. Ministers should endorse policies promoting sustainable diets, including plant-based food systems that use less land and water, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and support healthier, more equitable food access. Integrating these principles into national agriculture and trade policies will encourage a transformation towards more sustainable land-use practices.
2. **Massive Reforestation and Afforestation Initiatives:** As emphasized by St. Barbe Baker, trees are the "scientific solution" to Earth's environmental crisis. Reforestation and afforestation must become global priorities. Ministers should commit to large-scale reforestation projects, with an emphasis on native tree species that restore biodiversity, sequester carbon, and enhance ecosystem resilience. Additionally, policies should support the expansion of urban green spaces, which provide critical environmental and social benefits.
3. **Integrating Technology and Data-Driven Decision Making:** Leveraging machine learning (ML) and predictive analytics is key to advancing sustainable solutions. Using ML models to analyze trends in invasive species, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem health will guide more informed and adaptive policy solutions. Ministers should endorse the integration of advanced technologies into environmental governance, ensuring that data informs decision-making processes in real-time and across sectors.
4. **Inclusive and Transparent Environmental Governance:** Effective environmental governance requires broad stakeholder engagement, including local communities, Indigenous peoples, youth, and marginalized groups. Ministers should propose a framework for inclusive decision-making processes that ensure all voices are heard, particularly in environmental restoration and conservation efforts. This includes ensuring that policies consider socio-economic impacts and promote equity in access to environmental benefits.
5. **Education and Empowerment of Future Generations:** The next generation must be equipped to drive sustainable change. Governments should prioritize environmental education at all levels and promote youth-led environmental movements. Ministers should endorse initiatives that empower young people to take active roles in environmental stewardship, including fostering a culture of sustainability in schools and communities. This will help cultivate the ethical revolution necessary for advancing global sustainability.
6. **Commitment to Global Cooperation on Biodiversity and Climate:** Ministers should advocate for strong international cooperation to tackle both biodiversity loss and climate change in tandem. Given the interconnected nature of these crises, coordinated action is essential. This includes reinforcing commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement, ensuring that global frameworks provide

binding targets, and strengthening financial mechanisms to support developing nations in their environmental protection efforts.

7. **Legislating for Biodiversity Protection:** Governments must enact and enforce stronger laws to protect species at risk and halt habitat degradation. The Ministerial Declaration should highlight the urgency of legislative action to curb deforestation, halt land degradation, and prevent overexploitation of natural resources. This includes ensuring that recovery plans for endangered species are not only aspirational but contain measurable outcomes with clear timelines for action.

Conclusion: The Ministerial Declaration should reflect the urgent need for systemic change across sectors, emphasizing that sustainability must underpin all economic, social, and environmental policies. By shifting to plant-based economies, investing in reforestation, utilizing technology for better decision-making, and empowering youth, we can lay the foundation for a more resilient, sustainable world. This transformation will require not just government action but a global commitment to an ethical revolution—one that redefines prosperity and ensures the health of the planet for generations to come.

Any other message(s) would the Ministers for the Environment wish to be considered or included in the ministerial declaration

Additional Messages for UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration

In addition to the key actions and policy solutions outlined in the previous responses, the Ministers for the Environment should consider incorporating the following critical messages into the UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration:

1. **Interconnectedness of Humanity and Nature:** Humanity's well-being is intrinsically linked to the health of the environment. We must recognize that the Earth's resources are not merely tools for human consumption but essential elements of a broader ecological system that sustains all life. The Ministerial Declaration should stress the need for a holistic approach to environmental stewardship that integrates social, economic, and ecological factors into every decision, recognizing that actions which benefit nature also benefit humanity. This interconnectedness must be reflected in all policy and governance structures.
2. **A Call for Ethical Transformation in Consumption:** Drawing on the wisdom of Paul Hanley's book, *ELEVEN*, the Ministers should emphasize the urgency of adopting ethical consumption models. We must move away from excessive and wasteful consumption, particularly in affluent societies, and adopt lifestyles that promote the well-being of both people and the planet. The declaration should encourage governments, businesses, and individuals to prioritize sustainable, plant-based economies, significantly reducing the environmental toll of animal agriculture, and promoting regenerative practices like agroforestry that nourish both the land and the communities that rely on it.

3. **Empowering Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** The declaration should acknowledge the invaluable contributions of local and Indigenous communities in preserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable land use. Ministers must emphasize the need for inclusive environmental governance, in which the wisdom and practices of these communities are not only recognized but actively incorporated into decision-making processes. This empowers more resilient and culturally relevant solutions that reflect the unique environmental challenges faced by different regions.
4. **Climate and Biodiversity as Unified Fronts for Action:** The intertwined crises of climate change and biodiversity loss must be addressed together. Ministers should call for a comprehensive, systems-based approach that treats both challenges as part of a larger environmental crisis. Ensuring a coordinated response will not only help mitigate the worst impacts of climate change but will also safeguard the ecosystems that act as the Earth's natural carbon sinks, providing co-benefits for both people and biodiversity.
5. **Commitment to Rebuilding Ecological Systems through Large-Scale Restoration:** Building upon the ideas of Richard St. Barbe Baker, the Ministers should call for large-scale ecological restoration projects worldwide. These projects should focus on reforestation, wetland restoration, and the revitalization of temperate grasslands—the world's most endangered ecosystems—rebuilding habitats, enhancing biodiversity, and sequestering carbon. Such efforts would represent an ethical and practical solution to the dual crises of habitat destruction and climate change.
6. **Nurturing the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards:** A forward-thinking Ministerial Declaration must also make room for youth empowerment, emphasizing that the next generation of leaders must be equipped with the knowledge, values, and tools to drive sustainable solutions. Governments should commit to fostering environmental education that encourages a deep connection with nature, promotes responsible stewardship, and instills the ethical responsibility for the well-being of future generations.
7. **Fostering Global Solidarity and Justice:** Finally, it is essential that the declaration stresses the importance of global solidarity in environmental efforts. Environmental challenges are not confined by borders, and the impacts of degradation are felt most acutely by the most vulnerable populations. The Ministers must underscore the importance of environmental justice, ensuring that solutions to global challenges are equitable, and that the rights of those most affected by environmental harm—often Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities—are central to any response.

In conclusion, the UNEA-7 Ministerial Declaration should advocate for a global shift in how we perceive and engage with the natural world, recognizing that ecological well-being is foundational to human prosperity. Through ethical transformation, inclusivity, large-scale restoration, and empowerment of future stewards, we can build a resilient planet for all species, ensuring sustainable solutions for generations to come.

We stand ready to engage fully in the consultation process for UNEA-7 and contribute to its success. As advocates for sustainable solutions and environmental stewardship, we are

committed to advancing the principles of ecological restoration, social equity, and the urgent need to address the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. We eagerly look forward to participating in future discussions and contributing actionable solutions that will ensure a resilient and thriving planet for generations to come.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration, your Excellency. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this vital process and trust that these key considerations will be reflected in the Ministerial Declaration. Should further discussion or clarification be required, please do not hesitate to reach out. We remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting UNEP's efforts in advancing sustainable and welfare-conscious environmental policies, and we look forward to seeing the collective actions needed to secure a sustainable future for all.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Prince Sobere George', with a horizontal line underneath.

Prince Sobere George

Vice Chair,

Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas <https://stbarbebaker.wordpress.com>

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