

**Environment Assembly 2017 Preparatory Retreat
Windsor Golf Hotel & Country Club in Nairobi
27 – 28 October 2016**

Discussion Paper for Session 1: Proposed Themes for third Session of the UN Environment

A number of proposals have been submitted suggesting themes for the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3). These generally revolve around the three topics listed below and are linked to the 2030 Agenda and the 2018 theme for the High Level Political Forum, “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” They will all require actions from 1) political leaders, 2) citizens, and 3) the private sector. They will also carry a potential for a tangible, concrete outcome from the assembly.

Member States have set out basic criteria to help UN Environment identify potential themes. Criteria include: identify global solutions to global environmental issues; provide guidance to UN Environment’s work; result in an outcome that is appealing and meaningful to the outside world; contribute to raise the profile of the Environment Assembly and UN Environment globally; considers the balance between the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda; it should result in tangible global partnership initiatives.

Preliminary titles capture the intent for discussion and can be edited to have more mass appeal.

1. It’s time to clean our planet: reversing the curve on pollution

ALTERNATIVES:

- **Clean Earth Summit; Putting a plug on pollution**
- **Pollution Free Planet: Delivering a deal to detoxify the world**

Whether it is marine litter in the ocean or car emissions filling the skies, the impact of pollution is catastrophic, effecting over 100 million people, threatening jobs and putting at risks the health of our shared ecosystems.

The Second Session of the Environment Assembly addressed in its policy review session the underlying linkages between health and environment by documenting that chronic exposures to environmental pollutants in our water, air and soil are a growing concern in world as their effects on human health are profound. Along with the human toll, developing countries bear the economic cost of lost productivity, the burden on the health sector, a burden from degraded resources and long-term social consequences. At the same time, many countries are coping with a rapid rate of modernization and change. It is now a primary issues of public concern and while national legislation is addressing the manifestation of pollution, it needs to rise higher on policy agendas and development decisions need to involve a thorough consideration of issues related to environment and health, ahead of major investments and infrastructure commitments.

Coming 18 months after the last Assembly meeting, leaders and stakeholders can come together and commit on the basis of science to ambitious decisions that can improve the everyday life of the people in our planet. This proposal would allow the United Nations Environment Assembly to lay out a new pathway for the world to follow on this issue. Putting pollution in all of its manifestations at the centre of the global agenda would allow to build-up global consensus on addressing specific forms of pollution such as defining a global commitment to address the environmental impact of plastics and a commitment for clean air for all and be forward looking in proposing solutions to challenges that involve the private sector and civil society to showcase best practice and how industry and citizens are starting to address this issue.

2. One Earth revisited: investing now to build resilient societies

ALTERNATIVE: **Future 2050: Preparing the planet for 9 billion**

The world is likely to experience more shocks and stresses in the future, on scarcity and on other fronts, with increasing intensity. At the same time as trying to capitalize on the windows of opportunities that such crises may offer, policymakers also need to try to ensure that moments of system breakdown lead to renewal, rather than to collapse. Resilience is the quality that will determine the difference between these two outcomes.

Global population growth to 9 billion people by 2050 and increasing urbanization will exacerbate pressures on ecosystems, agriculture, and water resources. At the same time, land degradation biodiversity loss, climate change, and ocean acidification, are decreasing the adaptive capacity of ecosystems on which people depend. Environmental hazards, which may be unseen and/or emerge slowly over time, also compete as policy priorities with social, political, economic and humanitarian crises - some of which may be related to long-neglected environmental problems (e.g. floods and epidemics or drought and famine). The focus of this theme for UNEA would be to future gaze and make recommendations that would address the challenges facing the world which will demand major systems change.

Today's governments need to anticipate potential vulnerabilities and deliberately design for resilience by improving the diversity, adaptability, and cohesion of critical urban and industrial systems. Strengthening resilience today is a prerequisite for achieving long-term sustainability in the future. This will also require encouraging, cultivating, and scaling innovation outside government to tackle new issues.

This theme would examine how decision makers can make their societies and economies stronger and more resilient in the face of unpredictable shocks, whose disruptions are already rippling through economic, social, environmental, and political systems that are struggling to respond. It would also address how they effectively and dynamically reconfigure those systems to become more productive in the face of scarcity and lay out a series of recommendations as to how the world avoids a science fiction future.

3. Nature, society and behaviour

ALTERNATIVES:

- **50% for 2050: How to protect the planet**
- **Priceless Planet: Transforming our relationship with nature**

Across the world, citizens feel a strong emotional and spiritual connection to nature because of the intrinsic value they place on our wildlife and nature as well as a moral conviction that we have a duty to pass on the plants and animals we have inherited to future generations. But at the same time, we have also come to understand that we have a dependency on the food, water, materials, flood defences forests that sustain our economies, livelihoods and together, are vital to current and future prosperity as economic and social capital.

The continual decline in these services is a warning that we are living unsustainably. A world without functioning ecosystems would be an unhealthy and impoverished world. The pressures on our land and water are likely to continue to increase and there is need to enhance how we manage these resources in ways which deliver multiple benefits, for example, achieving profitable and productive farming while also adopting practices which enhance carbon storage, improve flood water management and support wildlife.

We need to devise a new approach that ensures a more resilient natural environment for the benefit of wildlife and ourselves so there is a harmony created between both needs. This will require strong leadership from government, but it will require effective and positive engagement with the landowners and land managers and due consideration given to the call for 50% of the planet to be protected by 2050. To make this happen, it will need improved collaboration between local authorities, local communities, private sectors, farmers, other land-managers and individual citizens with new agreements struck around how ecosystems are utilised in the world.

This theme would look at the application of techniques and ideas that are known to work in addressing the challenge of restoring our ecosystems while improving human wellbeing with the ambition that a Priceless Planet Protocol could be agreed at UNEA that would include a 10 Point Plan of action that could be taken forward.