

Time to Deliver

UNEA-2 must promote a global transformation of attitude and practice.

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Two years ago, I was honoured to participate in the inaugural United Nations Environment Assembly, the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, comprising all 193 United Nations Member States, and involving major stakeholders from business and civil society. The establishment of the UNEA by the 2012 Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development marked a coming of age for both UNEP and global environmental governance. It was testimony to the growing recognition that without careful management of the environment we will not succeed in our efforts to reduce poverty, improve global health and secure enduring peace and stability.

Last year, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And, last month, UN Headquarters in New York witnessed the historic signing of the Paris Agreement on climate change. UNEA-2 is an important early way station on the journey we must undertake to implement these landmark investments in a sustainable future for all.

All the topics on the UNEA-2 agenda are critical to global sustainable development, including the environmental rule of law, the illegal trade in wildlife, the protection of ecosystems, the management of natural capital, the pollution of the oceans and sustainable urban development. In caring for and repairing the environment, it will be necessary to take on many vested interests and reject entrenched attitudes. I urge all delegates at UNEA-2 to approach their responsibilities with courage and wisdom, with the knowledge that their decisions will have profound consequences for how the international community understands and delivers on the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

UNEA-2 is about action, collaboration and partnership among all sectors of society. It brings together the many partners we need to realize the 2030 Agenda: government officials, civil society representatives and members of the private sector. The number and diversity of those taking part in this year's Assembly already marks an important step towards Sustainable Development Goal 17: "To revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development". I would like to extend a special welcome to those taking part in the Sustainable Innovation Expo, which is bringing together CEOs, institutional investors, foundations, banks, insurance companies and civil society representatives in a coalition for the SDGs.

Business and investment are critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Innovation from the private sector will be key to addressing the many interlinked challenges of global development. This is not simply about what the private sector can do for sustainable development; it is also about what sustainable development can do for the private sector. Trillions of dollars in public and private funds are going to be invested in reaching the SDGs, creating huge opportunities for responsible companies that are ready to deliver solutions. That is the route to ending poverty, increasing opportunity and laying the foundation for sustainable global economic growth.

The UNEA-2 symposium on mobilizing resources for sustainable investments will take up this theme, and provide companies an opportunity to engage directly with Governments to determine how best to bring their innovations to scale. A second symposium on environment and displacement will build important bridges between the environment and humanitarian communities, bringing together key actors to discuss the role of environmental degradation in the forced displacement of people and communities.

In a very real sense, 2016 is even more important than 2015. This year, we begin the hard work of turning our ambitions into reality. We need all sectors and all nations to work together to combat climate change and promote sustainable development. The UN Environment Assembly has already established itself as the premier forum for global environmental governance. Now, those taking part in UNEA-2 have both the power and the responsibility to promote a global transformation of attitude and practice. The message is clear: we cannot promote sustainable development unless and until we recognize and address its environmental dimensions. We are entering an exciting new era of opportunity. Let us commit to working together to deliver a sustainable future for people and planet.