



Climate Action Network

Input to Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document
of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly
“Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”

August 2017

Climate Action Network (CAN) is the world’s largest network of civil society organizations working together to promote government action to address the climate crisis, with more than 1100 members in over 120 countries. www.climatenetwork.org

Introduction

Climate Action Network (CAN) welcomes the opportunity to offer comments and recommendations to the zero draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet” and compliments the President of the United Nations Environment Assembly and Minister of Environment and Energy of the Republic of Costa Rica for designing an open and transparent process in developing the Declaration.

While we recognize that the Declaration has several useful elements to identify the most pressing issues related to pollution, we consider that the Ministerial Declaration still falls short in identifying concrete steps towards the goal of ending pollution in all its forms.

With air pollution being the single largest, deadly and detrimental pollution impact that prematurely kills almost 8 million people annually, mostly in developing countries, CAN is fully supportive of the recommendations of the recent scientific report of UN Environment “Towards a Pollution Free Planet”. In line with Climate Action Network expertise, we would like to offer some concrete suggestions on how to strengthen the declaration considerably by committing to concrete measures towards ending air pollution globally.

Concrete recommendations for reducing air pollution globally

In line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals Ministers should commit to the following:

- Phasing out coal by 2030 in developed nations and by 2040 in developing countries, given that coal is the single largest source of carbon and air pollution;
- Phase out Diesel fuels in the next two decades in all transport and other usages as a main source for deadly particulate emissions and NOx that are particularly impacting large and densely populated cities;
- Rapidly develop national legislative and implementation plans to overcome, by 2030 at the latest, the high dependence of a large portion of developing countries’ poor households to locally sourced and very inefficiently combusted biomass like animal dung

and firewood and promote, fund and support much less polluting and clean cooking practices such as efficient woodstoves, biogas digesters and sustainable agroforestry schemes for producing fuel wood;

- Adopt the World Health Organization air quality guidelines, including those for indoor air quality, as a minimum for national standards and invest in strong air quality monitoring systems;
- Meet World Health Organization air quality guidelines through the reduction of emissions from major industrial sources including particulate matter, sulphates, nitrogen oxides, persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals;
- Reduce global vehicle emissions by at least 90 per cent through the introduction of advanced vehicle emissions standards (e.g. at least Euro 4 level) in 5 years, and a move to only electric vehicles being added to fleets by 2030;
- Offer effective and affordable public transport and non-motorized transport infrastructure in all cities above 500,000 inhabitants by 2030;
- Increase the share of non-polluting renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and tidal to 36 per cent by 2030, while addressing related production and waste stages of such (notably, batteries);
- Increase access of households to clean cooking fuels and technologies;
- Protect and restore ecosystems to avoid air pollution in drylands, rangelands and other areas prone to erosion, fire, desiccation and other forms of degradation;
- Expand green spaces in urban areas to improve ambient air quality in cities;
- Commit to working with every possible stakeholder to rapidly explore and implement every possible solution to end the pollution of our air, soil, freshwater and oceans, and to protect ecosystems and the climate;
- Strengthen reference to the role that public access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to judicial remedies can play in empowering communities to address the sources of pollution and their impacts. These references must be distinct and complementary to references to the importance of science-based decision-making and the role of research;
- Set-up an interministerial working group that functions as a coordination body, with specific sub-groups on various kinds of pollution, under the auspices of UNEP in early 2018 with an intention to review a global action plan in 2019 and identify concrete measures and targets and timetables to significantly reduce and eventually abolish all forms of pollution by well before 2050. The interministerial and working groups should not be limited to governmental experts but informed by civil society, scientists, and businesses working on clean technologies; and
- Finally, we would encourage Ministers to act on the basis of the precautionary principle when dealing with risks from pollution, the design of global policy and the instigation of research.

Please see our concrete textual suggestions to the current outline of the declaration in red below.

Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”

In South America, young mothers like Maria handle raw mercury in artisan gold mines, because it is the only way to make a living. In North America, families like the Kellogg’s relocate to areas where their children can play outside without fear of an asthma attack. In Europe, schools like Fatima Gunic hoist flags in the playground to monitor air pollution. In Africa, communities like Ogoniland try to survive in land saturated by oil pollution. In the Middle East, residents in places like Khuzestan must breathe through the growing number of sand and dust storms swallowing their homes and closing their schools. And in Asia, people like 13 year old Lim Seong-joon are crippled because of chemicals being used incorrectly. In fact, during the next hour, another 1,500 people around the world will needlessly die from environmental causes.

We, the world’s ministers of environment, gathered for the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, declare that this cannot and will not continue. We commit to securing a pollution free future for our people and planet. And we commit to working with every possible stakeholder to rapidly explore and implement every possible solution to end the pollution of our air, soil, freshwater and oceans, **and to protect ecosystems and the climate.**

As the representatives of 193 nations, we believe that, regardless of gender or culture, faith or wealth, no child should die from dirty water or poor hygiene. Yet today, nearly 2,000 children below the age of five will do just that. No one should choke because they walk down a street or cook a hot meal in their home. Yet every day, 9 out of 10 of us will continue to breathe air that is unsafe and 20,000 people will die because of it. No community should be contaminated by hazardous chemicals and waste. Yet of the 130,000 chemicals on the market, only a fraction is properly tested, labelled or tracked. No ecosystem should be so damaged by consumer choices that it ceases to function properly. Yet every year, we dump up to 13 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans and 50 million tonnes of electronic waste on our land. No one should be left behind as we strive to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or other international agreements. Yet it is still the poorest and most vulnerable people in society who are disproportionately affected; often paying the price for the action of the wealthiest.

This Assembly agrees that everyone on this planet has an equal right to live in a clean **and healthy** environment, with access to safe water, food and air. These are the most precious of natural resources. Any threat to them is a threat to our health, our society, our economy, our security and our very survival. Pollution is not new, but with the population expected to reach 10 billion people by 2050, these self-imposed threats have never been greater or more preventable.

However, we also agree that with leadership, determination, collaboration, knowledge and technology, our options for turning these threats into opportunities are increasing just as fast. The transition to a pollution free planet is not only achievable, but can help tackle poverty, improve health, reduce global warming, build peace, protect human rights, create jobs and drive economic growth. We must recapture and reinvest the 300 tonnes of gold buried in electronic waste every year; the \$100 billion in plastic packaging being thrown away; the \$1 trillion

economic loss from exposing children to lead in paint; and the \$5 trillion spent on healthcare because of air pollution. **We must focus on reducing and cutting off the production of short-lived climate pollutants because not doing so would not only impact public health and endanger food and water security, it would also increase the chances of reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature increase above pre-industrial levels in the next few years.** To do so, we must dramatically scale up and accelerate the solutions that countries, cities, businesses and individual citizens are already using. **Urgent and collective action to tackle the sources and impacts of pollution is necessary to ensure the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and other key commitments of the international community.**

Therefore, we acknowledge the magnitude of threats and opportunities reported in *Towards a Pollution Free Planet* serve and commit to preventing, mitigating and managing pollution in every form, **while acting on the basis of the precautionary principle**, by:

- Supporting the development, collation and use of reliable scientific data. This includes better multidisciplinary indicators; more efficient data gathering and monitoring; and an increase in awareness raising and knowledge sharing. This will promote evidence-based decision-making in the public and private sectors, effective standard setting by all stakeholders.
- Promoting **public** access to and wider availability of information; **effective participation of the public in particular, of groups most exposed to pollution, to relevant decision making, and effective access to judicial remedies.** This will enable greater participation by citizens from all walks of life **to address the sources and impacts of pollution and to protect ecosystems and the climate.**
- Targeting pollutants with focused environmental agreements and tailored action. This will be achieved in two ways. Either by developing global policy to prevent, reduce and control pollutants or by increasing research on pollutants where the impact is not yet clear. **Another way is to mainstream existing international policies such as the World Health Organization air quality guidelines, including those for indoor air quality, as a minimum for national standards, and enforce such through the reduction of emissions from major industrial sources including particulate matter, sulphates, nitrogen oxides, persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals.**
- Cultivating economic productivity and job creation by using incentives to increase innovation and the uptake of new technology. This will make it easier for producers and consumers to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and services.
- Nurturing integrated urban development to create more liveable villages, towns and cities, which thrive in harmony with the surrounding environment. This includes accelerating the sound management of chemicals and waste, encouraging responsible lifestyle choices, **expanding green spaces to improve air quality**, prioritizing access to clean energy, **technologies**, and transport, and leveraging the power of big data.
- **Promoting effective and affordable public transport and non-motorized transport infrastructure with the goal of reducing global vehicle emissions by introducing advanced vehicle emission standards, limiting fleet additions to electric powered vehicles and phasing out of Diesel fuels in all transport.**
- Promoting fiscal incentives to stimulate systemic and behavioural changes. This includes internalising the true cost of pollution in financial decisions and redirecting investments from

the short-term profits of polluting activities to the more sustainable profits of greener alternatives.

- Strengthening and enforcing more integrated policies, regulations and laws. This will be achieved by supporting institutions and building capacity; bolstering monitoring and accountability systems; and sharing best practices, standards, policy instruments and tools.
- Creating and expanding partnerships across the United Nations, as well as with governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and individual citizens. This includes emphasizing enormous potential of partnerships between different stakeholders among developing nations.
- Forming, under the auspices of the UNEP, a multi-stakeholder interministerial working group that functions as a supervising coordinative body, as well as specific sub-groups on the various kinds of pollution in early 2018, with a review in 2019. Committing on a global action plan with concrete measures, targets, and timetables to significantly reduce, and eventually abolish, all forms of pollution by well before 2050.

As ministers of the environment, we recognize that we are accountable for delivering on those commitments. As just a few of the 7.5 billion people living here, we urge our fellow citizens to recognize that every one of us is responsible for making that happen. And, as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, friends, colleagues, neighbours and communities, we cannot overstate the need to make it happen quickly. In the time it has taken you to read this declaration, some 200 people have died from environmentally modifiable factors; nearly half of that just from breathing.

Therefore, we warmly welcome the resolutions adopted at the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. We applaud the many pledges from diverse stakeholders that address critical environmental challenges. And we restate our commitment to work towards a pollution free planet for present and future generations.