

# **STATEMENT BY THE ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

## **COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES**

**JANUARY 2019**

Good morning Excellencies, Member States and colleagues.

Welcome to the first meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives for 2019.

Please allow me to start by wishing you, your family and colleagues, a wonderful, peaceful, happy year.

If last year saw many of the impacts of climate change truly hit home, 2019 is the year when we take decisive action to save our warming planet and remind ourselves that at every step - our solutions must carry the citizens we serve, with them.

2018 was a turbulent and challenging year for us and I thank you for your support. In particular, thanks to our staff and all of you for your enormous support.

Today, I hope to reflect on the following:

- (1) The measures we are taking as a management team to address internal challenges; implementing the audit report; and updating you on senior-level recruitments.
- (2) I would like to share with you key highlights of our programme of work in 2018, including a few accomplishments we are particularly proud of, going beyond the Quarterly Report which has already been shared.
- (3) Lastly, our priorities for 2019 in the global environment landscape that we see.

***On the audit follow-up:***

We have taken quick steps to implement the 14 recommendations of the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on official travel at the agency. Action has

been three-fold. One, leadership is clearly articulating at every stage, beginning with ourselves, that UN rules and regulations are non-negotiable. Two, we are issuing new and update travel guidelines. Three, we are intensifying efforts to account for and recover outstanding travel advances. I am happy to share that in 6 months, we have settled close to 80% of such advances identified during the Audit. My thanks to the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the UN office in Nairobi, as well as to all of you for your support. My colleague Sonja Leighton-Kone, our new Director of Corporate Services will share more details on this after my remarks.

***On the new Executive Director vacancy***

Many of you would have seen the announcement inviting candidates to apply for the position of Executive Director. The deadline for applications closed on 31 December. The

selection process is being handled directly by the Secretary-General's office and they hope to nominate someone as soon as possible. The UN Environment Programme is not involved in the selection process.

### ***On the senior leadership team and staff morale***

As an outcome of the senior management team retreat in November 2018, as a team, we have agreed to work more closely on the policy needs of all member states, and to strengthen our role as a convening power, and advocacy which inspires and commits people to action. In building a stronger institution, over the next six months we plan to focus on: Delivering as One UN Environment; assessing and strengthening funding mechanisms and financial management; resource mobilization and workforce planning, including staff training. We are also exploring the possibility of additional consultancy support, including on private sector

strategy. We hope to develop a series of options which will be offered to the incoming Executive Director to take forward.

Staff is our most important asset and building staff confidence and strengthening internal communications has been a priority since I assumed office. The experts that facilitated our senior management team retreat, remain engaged, as a sounding board for senior staff, and offering teams tailored support on challenges we face.

***The programme of work:***

We are well advanced in finalizing the programme of work for 2020 – 21.

The draft underwent extensive consultations with Member States in 2018. Our aim has been to ensure our programme of work reflects lessons learned, be ambitious yet realistic and pragmatic budget envelop, and integrates further, the 2030

Agenda and resolutions passed at the UN Environment Assembly. You have guided successive drafts of the Programme of Work and I am confident that we have a draft that is fully aligned with your guidance, inputs and expectations.

Discussion on the draft resolution for the draft Programme of Work and Budget are expected to continue until the end of the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. This will allow Member States who are not represented in Nairobi, to engage in the final phase of discussions. My gratitude to staff, Member States and partners for their support in this process.

***Key accomplishments:***

Moving now to what we achieved in 2018 -- the past year has been an incredibly busy year and also one which hosted several important multilateral meetings. It would not be

possible for me to run through an entire list of all that we have achieved, so I will highlight just a few key accomplishments. Our aim has been to provide the science, platforms, advocacy and action that can make a powerful difference in addressing environmental challenges.

**1. In 2018, we made tremendous progress on our work on pollution.**

We partnered with the World Health Organisation to host the first-ever global meeting on air pollution and health, drawing attention to the unacceptable health costs of air pollution. At the conference, participants called for scaling up the BreatheLife campaign led by UN Environment Programme, World Health Organization and partners, to reach 500 BreatheLife cities and 20 countries by 2020.

Recognizing the important role that clean transport will play in shaping a pollution-free world, we supported the

development of national strategies for electric mobility in Argentina, Colombia and Panama. We are also helping Chile and Costa Rica, expand the use of electric buses as a mode of public transport. We are excited to be supporting countries chart a different course in a region in where vehicular fleets are expanding rapidly and urbanization trends are increasing.

**2. 2018 will perhaps be remembered as the year when we talked more about the extent of the single-use plastic crisis than ever before.** And I am so proud that our advocacy scaled new heights. We used World Environment Day 2018 as an opportunity to inspire people and countries to take action. Our messages and call to act reached out to hundreds of millions, in more than 200 countries and 60 languages. Indian Prime Minister Modi's pledge to phase out single-use plastic by 2022 has set the bar high for the rest of the world. This



World Environment Day was the culmination of efforts by Member States to focus the world's attention and galvanize action around plastic pollution and I congratulate all of you on this spectacular effort. With commitments from 57 nations covering more than 60 percent of the world's coastlines, the global Clean Seas campaign is now the largest global compact for combatting marine litter.

We continue to develop platforms that can help take best practices from our Member States, global. On the sidelines of the General Assembly, we launched the Global Plastics Platform inviting governments to join this network that will encourage new commitments to reduce plastic pollution.

UN Environment Programme, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and partners also launched the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, signed by 250+ organizations aiming to

eliminate plastic waste and pollution at source. The Commitment will be a major driver towards a circular economy.

**3. Several milestones on restoration, finance and south south cooperation were crossed in 2018.** The first-ever Tropical Landscapes Bond launched in collaboration with BNP Paribas, the World Agroforestry Centre and partners will restore 80,000 hectares in Indonesia. We were able to use our convening power to bring together organizations and countries to save one of the world's most important carbon stocks – the Cuvette Central Peatlands in the Congo Basin. The Brazzaville Declaration signed by the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Indonesia represents south-south cooperation at its best.

**4. In Mexico we worked closely with the Ministry of Energy and Mexico's Banking Association to launch CSOLAR -** which will support financing for installation of solar panels by small and medium size enterprises, providing an important boost to clean and distributed power generation in the country.

**5. We have continued to strengthen our work on environmental law.** Our flagship report on the Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics provided critical guidance to Member States on regulating manufacture, sale and disposal of single-use plastics. This assessment will be used to help develop a model law on marine litter and microplastics regulation in the coming year. We have worked closely on building capacities to strengthen the ability of countries to regulate for the environment. Chief Justices from Africa adopted the

Maputo Declaration – a commitment to develop and integrate environmental law into judicial training programmes. Lahore, Pakistan created the country's first environmental law bar association. The Escazu Agreement is the first legally binding instrument on human rights and environment in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the first legally binding instrument to protect environmental human rights defenders.

**6. June marked the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Environment Facility cycle and I am pleased to report that we mobilized US\$ 530 million over four years to address pressing environmental challenges. We have also been selected to lead a flagship initiative for the Congo Basin.**

**7. The joint UNDP-UN Environment Programme initiative worked with the governments of Mali, Mozambique and Rwanda to ensure environmental sustainability and**

climate action is prioritized in 30 new district development plans across these countries.

**8. The speedy removal of rubble in the aftermath of conflict is critical to ensuring people can return to rebuild livelihoods.** We contributed to improving sustainability of post conflict recovery in Iraq, kick-starting recycling rubbish pilots in the Old city of Mosul in partnership with other UN agencies.

**9. Our work on financing for sustainable development broke new ground when world's leading CEOs** gathered in Paris to launch a global consultation to draft principles for responsible banking. Through this we will set a global standard on how banks and financial institutions can create value for both shareholders and society. With participants representing US\$ 20 trillion, 2019 will

undoubtedly be an exciting year in our efforts to finance sustainable development and climate action.

In addition to key highlights from our programme of work I have outlined above, last year saw several important gatherings on multilateral agreements and critical consensus on environmental challenges.

--- **Hosted by Egypt, the Conference of Parties on Biological Diversity** adopted the Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration which called for an ambitious, transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

--- **At the second meeting of the conference of parties to the Minimata Convention on Mercury** – significant progress was made on a number of technical and institutional issues

including mercury waste thresholds, interim storage, harmonizing customs codes and financing.

**--- And finally, at the COP 24 in Poland, countries agreed on a rulebook on how countries will finance and ensure transparency in implementing the Paris Agreement.** Our Emissions Gap Report 2018 complemented the 1.5 degree report recently released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and provided additional compelling and sound science. The emissions gap assessment provided critical input to the processes in Katowice and showed the world's ambition needs to be tripled to stay within 2°C warming. The Rule Book provides useful clarity that will help us support Member States in technology transfer, finance, adaptation and transparency in implementation.

## ***Looking ahead: 2019***

As the pre-eminent global environmental authority, we are well positioned to provide the leadership that the world needs in tackling our planet's most urgent challenges. Our role in highlighting best practices, as advocates for action, and as a convening authority to bring together governments, businesses and civil society, is critical.

Within our programme of work, we identified several priorities that we will elevate, working closely with Member States and partners to: scale up our work on circularity; ensure the best deal for nature; mobilize science and data to inform policy and green solutions; promote greener cities, working closely with UN Habitat, and encouraging a shift to renewable energy and climate change.

The UN Environment Assembly is in less than two months and is a tremendous opportunity for us to focus on how innovation



is changing the choices we make and how we consume and produce. Our attempt is to provide global leadership and catalyze intergovernmental action necessary for us to live sustainably. This is a Member State-driven process and we look to your leadership to ensure we have a powerful and ambitious ministerial declaration and resolutions that truly reflect our joint and urgent efforts to protect this planet.

And finally, the UN reform efforts are underway and we are fully engaged. As the Secretary-General has said, the structural changes lay the foundations for a more effective, accountable and more responsive organization. The “new way of working” will have significant implications for how we plan, deliver and report on results at the global, regional and country levels. We will work more closely with other UN agencies to contribute meaningfully to UN-wide action and results. We are carefully assessing the financial implications of

the reforms, including the new 1% levy. Operational guidance is being finalized and we can expect more information on this soon. We will keep you informed.

The bottom line is that while we are a small agency, our mandate is hugely important to achieving sustainable development. And this is a real opportunity for us to ensure that the UN delivers for the environment in every corner of the world. It's a mission we are embracing whole-heartedly.

On this note, I end my remarks to you today. We are looking forward to an exciting year, in which we move full speed ahead to deliver our mandate for people and planet.

In Kiswahili, we have a saying: *Mito ikinenepa ni kwa sababu ya mito mingine.*

If a river is high, it is because other rivers have joined. A river is enlarged by its tributaries.

I look forward to working closely with Member States, partners and staff, in achieving our ambitious vision.

Thank you very much.

*Asante sana*