

146TH COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES
Statement by the Executive Director
20 JUNE 2019 | TIME: 10:00 AM | VENUE: CONFERENCE ROOM 1

Excellencies, colleagues

The UN Environment Programme has a proud history of horizon watching, of identifying waves that are coming to our shores and of supporting nations to come to agreement on some of the biggest planetary challenges we face.

Since 1972 we have played a leading voice in strengthening science for policy; supporting global governance for the environment; and in convening for change.

I am honoured and privileged to address you today as the Head of the UN Environment Programme.

There are many reasons why I am proud to be at this institution, but perhaps what motivates me the most is that we are truly led by member states.

And therefore I stand before you today as a listener and fellow traveler, on this journey towards a stronger institution, to push the needle on sustainability for member states and for the people on this planet.

We are at one of the most complex moments in history. The health of our environment and what's at stake is more in public conscience than ever before. The science is definitive. We have a limited window of opportunity to steer humanity towards sustainability. But with these challenges have come astonishing human capacity for innovation and imagination towards finding solutions.

We cannot achieve peace and prosperity without safeguarding the planet and this is indeed enshrined in the sustainable development goals. The vision and expectations of member states as clearly articulated in the Rio + 20 outcome document and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development will continue to our guiding force.

I am committed to direct and systematic engagement and to “proving our worth through action” as the UN Secretary-General has said – through engagement with capitals, at ministerial fora and through our governing bodies such as the Committee of Permanent Representatives, assembly and other related bureaus.

Strengthening organizational performance through our Medium Term strategy and Programme of Work which form the foundations of our organization is critical.

With the deadline of the SDGs looming close, just 10 years away, we have a tremendous opportunity to strengthen our work through the next medium term strategy on which we begin work on this year.

I will continue to re-build the confidence of Member States to systematically address issues of accountability, transparency, budgets and programme clarity.

As I have noted in the regional meetings I've held with you, my enormous thanks to Joyce who has really steered this ship with the support of our member states and our staff over the last seven months.

As I step into this leadership position, I will ensure a well-functioning top leadership team and that together, we will ensure together ensure the appropriate tone at the top.

Staff are the greatest asset we have at the UN Environment Programme. We will pay particular attention to the softer elements of leadership. In line with the Secretary -General priorities, I will be unflinching in my efforts to promote gender parity, geographical diversity, fairness of treatment, etc.

We are here to support the wider UN system and every process linked to environmental action. We afford the highest priority to the UN reform process both in terms of embedding environmental issues across the work of the UN and in using the delivery mechanisms of UN agencies to support our mandate.

In September this year, the UN Secretary-General will convene a Climate Action Summit, countries will showcase a collective leap in ambition. Our work on nature-based solutions with Member States will make an important contribution in demonstrating cost-effective solutions from the natural world with multiple benefits – ecosystem restoration; livelihoods; and for emissions reduction.

In 2020, at the next meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the post 2020 framework for biodiversity will be discussed and the world will agree on new and – I hope – ambitious targets to arrest biodiversity loss. We look forward to contributing to these processes to “up” the action and to enhance the ambition.

Success for us means halting the rapid loss of species. Success for us means preventing seven million people premature deaths from air pollution each year. Success for us means countries taking action towards sustainable consumption and production. Success for us means a planet powered by clean energy. Success for us means all of humanity reaping the benefits of a healthy planet and thriving environment for centuries to come.

This is what I will work towards with the strong support of you and member states and the management and capabilities of staff at the UN Environment Programme.

Thank you very much.