



Statement of Mr. Ola Elvestuen, President of the United Nations Environment Assembly, to the 2019 Session of the High-Level Political Forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. 16 July 2019

Distinguished Inga Rhonda King, President of the Economic and Social Council,
Distinguished Ministers and delegates,
Distinguished representatives of the major groups:

The United Nations Environment Assembly, with universal membership and the involvement of all stakeholders, is the highest decision-making body on the environment within the United Nations.

As President of the United Nations Environment Assembly, I am honoured to share key messages and recommendations from the fourth session of the Assembly held in March 2019, under the theme “Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production”.

The first key message might seem obvious but is critical: ensuring the health of the planet remains essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recent scientific analysis and findings, such as the Global Environment Outlook and the report about nature from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, clearly document unprecedented environmental challenges, that threaten our health, livelihoods, culture and security. If not addressed in a dedicated manner, they will gradually undermine the foundation of global prosperity, stability and equity. It is especially worth noting, that the problems outgrow the pace of our substantial efforts. This applies to biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution.

The current emissions trends imply an increased global warming of at least three degrees Celsius by twenty-one hundred (2100). This is not a world that can realize the Sustainable Development Goals, regardless of all the other efforts we pursue. The 2018 Emissions Gap Report shows that the global level of ambition needs to be substantially increased, if we are to stay within the two and one point five degree scenario.

A second message is that degraded ecosystems adapt badly to the changes we impose on it, whether climate change or fragmentation of natural areas through agriculture and urban development. By harming the biosphere through the way we build, produce and consume goods, we could harm the adaptability of nature and ourselves. Vulnerable people, particularly women and children in developing countries, are at special risk. Measures for more effective adaptation are urgently required.

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns intensify the rates of resource exploitation beyond the ability of ecosystems to recover. Innovative solutions are necessary to change these patterns. We can achieve an economy where resources are used efficiently, where sustainable production and lifestyles are a reality. We can gain economic opportunities, savings and jobs as we reduce our impact on the natural cycles and become better at reusing, remanufacturing and refurbishing products.

A third message, is that the UN Environment Assembly and the High-Level Political Forum must provide political guidance to inspire innovation and scaling-up of effective solutions to sustainable consumption and production patterns. Food, energy, transport and chemicals are examples of systems in dire need of more profound innovation.

New solutions will be found within new technologies, in sustainable finance and effective fiscal policies. It will be found by governments and stakeholders that think outside the box to achieve resource efficient and low carbon economies. New opportunities arise when we fight root causes of poverty, all while restoring ecosystems and use and conserve resources sustainably. We must employ landscape management measures to combat biodiversity loss and land degradation.

Governments need to fight pollution and waste and improve national environmental monitoring systems and technologies.

Lastly, let me point out that environmental rule of law is fundamental to achieving the 2030 Agenda and to promote equity and inclusiveness. But while the number of environmental laws has grown dramatically over the last three decades, implementation and enforcement fall far short of what is required. The Fifth Montevideo Programme, adopted by the Environment Assembly, seeks to address these challenges, and the Assembly will look at further measures to enhance implementation going forward.

The United Nations Environment Assembly will continue to identify effective policy recommendations and share experiences to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these messages with you.