

**149th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
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Speech by Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP

Ambassador Coimbra,

Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

It has been an extraordinary and catastrophic start to 2020 with devastating bushfires in Australia, the warmest January on record, floods in the Horn of Africa, and locust invasions in East Africa. As we struggle to respond to the relentless pace of these extreme events, it is clear that now, at this moment in time, we simply have no choice but to take action and pull back from planetary instability and reverse the loss of nature.

And it is in 2020 that this must happen. In the Super Year for Nature, we have many opportunities to start delivering solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. This is the year in which we need to match ambition with action, action with momentum, and political will with science. This is the year in which when we must finally ensure that we back nature as the imperative for many of the challenges facing humanity.

COP 25 and climate ambition

It is no surprise that many were disappointed with the headline outcomes of COP 25. We needed a massive step up in ambition on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This did not happen. Nor did the COP deliver on finalizing the Paris Rule Book pertaining to Article 6, which means we have no market mechanism in place. This is a lost opportunity that we simply must make up for at Glasgow when countries submit their stretched NDCs.

But being disappointed is not the same as being disheartened, and there were reasons to feel optimistic.

- Our Emissions Gap Report was THE science quoted across the house and this represents UNEP at its best – sound, authoritative science backed by strong communications and outreach. The appetite for science that provides a way forward is stronger than ever.
- Many countries including EU member states committed to carbon neutrality by 2050.
- 73 nations announced plans to submit enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions at the next COP, in Glasgow.
- We saw regions, cities, businesses and investors working towards net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2050. The Net-Zero Asset Owners Alliance, for example, now has pension funds promising to decarbonize their investments by 2050. Together, these funds have total assets under management of US\$ 3.9 trillion dollars.
- And, of course, young people took over the stage to remind us of our responsibilities.

This shows that the stage is set for serious climate action. We can still put out the fires, literally and metaphorically, if each of us gives of our best.

Raising the nature imperative

And much of our success will depend on the recognition that nature is the foundation of our economy, our prosperity and the planet. Indeed nature feeds us, clothes us, regulates temperatures, ensures the ingredients of good health and provides us the water we drink. This is the ask for the Super Year 2020 – to generate a groundswell of action for action on nature and a sustainable future for all because 14 out of the 17 sustainable development goals are in fact underlined by nature’s productive system.

This message is getting through. We saw this at the World Economic Forum, in Davos, where environmental concerns dominated the annual Global Risks Report with five of the top risks identified as environmental and for the first time, CEOs reported that biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse are what keep business leaders up at night. And so they should. The WEF’s Nature Risk Rising Report says that about US\$ 44 trillion dollars, over half the world’s GDP, depends on nature and its services.

Businesses are beginning to understand the impact this will have on their profit margins. We now need them to act on this knowledge by:

- Understanding, valuing and disclosing their impact and dependency on nature
- Transforming investments and operations to generate a no net loss/ positive gain in biodiversity
- Halting deforestation and moving towards zero habitat conversion for production
- And collaborating on infrastructure and the built environment; energy and extractives; food; land and oceans

And we saw the launch of interesting initiatives such as the One Trillion Tree campaign, a platform for leading governments, businesses, civil society and ecopreneurs committed to restoring and reforesting the planet.

Biodiversity framework

The mobilization of the business community to support the biodiversity agenda, is an important step in building momentum for the adoption of an ambitious, inclusive and meaningful global biodiversity framework in Kunming in October 2020.

To make the framework a success, we need buy-in from business and from other sectors. We also need clear targets and indicators, greater ambition and a focus on quality as well as quantity for protected areas. The [Zero-draft of the post-2020 biodiversity framework](#), recently released by the CBD Secretariat, is a good first step in delivering these elements.

I look forward to the second open-ended working group meeting that will convene next week in Rome, Italy at the headquarters of the Food and Agricultural Organisation. My sympathies and solidarity with the Government of the People’s Republic China as they confront the public health emergency resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

The many opportunities of the Super Year

But the framework is not the only opportunity in this Super Year.

- The curtain raiser for 2020 by way of the 13th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species currently underway in India
- The Paris Agreement implementation begins in earnest; stronger Nationally Determined Contributions will allow nations to prioritize nature-based solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation.
- We have the Oceans Conference in Lisbon.
- We have the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille
- World Environment Day, which will focus on biodiversity.
- The High Level Political Forum focused on realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.
- We have the UN Nature Summit in New York.
- We have the COP 15 in Kunming.
- We have COP 26 in Glasgow.
- The international community will agree on a new framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste.

All of the outcomes of these important moments will come together at the 5th UN Environment Assembly in 2021 which will also be the launch pad for the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration.

STRONGER UNEP

UNEP will be working flat out throughout this crucial year to play its part and there are several processes underway, most important of which is to agree on a new Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) and programme of work for the period 2022 – 2025.

As part of the transformation process that I launched some time ago, we have heard the voices of more than 400 of our staff that participated in discovery sessions. These voices were unanimous in their joint desire to build a more focused, aligned, effective and impactful UNEP. Drawing from the feedback received from UNEP staff, I intend to convene a retreat with Member States in March to jointly brainstorm on the contours of the next MTS so that we will collectively begin to work on.

As we advance along this journey, I continue to take steps to strengthen UNEP. I re-aligned and consolidated the core functions of the Policy and Programme Division so that the team provide undivided attention to its core mandate at the strategic, policy and programmatic levels, and UN reform.

In parallel, in response to requests from Member States to elevate our work on disaster and conflict, we are launching an external review of our work in fragile states, which will feed into the next MTS.

Likewise, I am taking steps to strengthen the implementation of UNEP's resource mobilization efforts including working with member states and exploring fundraising with less traditional sources of funding.

I am confident that these measures taken as part of our transformation process will allow us to take a hard look at what is working well, where we can build on the amazing staff and talent on hand, and how we can use the power of science to shift the needle on sustainability.

Turning to senior appointments, allow me to introduce and welcome Monika Stankiewicz as the Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention who is here with us today.

My congratulations also to Amy Fraenkel who has been appointed Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species. Amy is currently leading the 13th CMS COP underway in India.

And by way of a final update on senior appointments, we have advertised the vacancy of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Moving faster together on UN reform: UNEP and UNDP

As part of the reform process, including wider efforts to strengthen environmental action within the UN, we are accelerating our efforts to work closer with other UN agencies. In late January, I was delighted to [welcome](#) Haoliang Xu, Director of UNDP's Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, and his team to explore three entry points for further collaboration – climate, nature, and the green economy. I look forward to seeing this enhanced collaboration deliver this year. In the months ahead, we will also look forward to striking deeper collaboration with other UN agencies, including FAO, particularly as we step up our joint efforts on the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

UNEP at 50

The Stockholm Convention in 1972 was an important threshold for the many successes of the multilateral environmental governance process that have followed and the UNEP at 50 commemoration will be an important moment for us to celebrate and recommit to environmental action. I will therefore have the pleasure to brief the Committee on the preparations underway to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the Programme during the course of the day.

This commemoration will take place in 2022. By then, I expect us to have something new to celebrate. I expect the international community, based on the hard work we will do this year, to have set the right targets and goals for nature. I expect us to have begun implementing them. I expect to see real progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, protecting and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, reducing pollution and helping vulnerable communities cope. In short, I expect us to be travelling down the long road to reversing the planetary instability that humanity has created.

This is the Super Year for Nature but it will also be the Super Year for humanity if we dedicate all of our efforts to wringing every drop out of the opportunities it presents us.

Thank you for your commitment, and I look forward to working with you as we get the job done.