

Sub-Committee, Committee of Permanent Representatives

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**Remarks by Inger Andersen, UN-Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN
Environment Programme**

(As prepared for delivery)

H.E. Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

Ambassadors and Excellencies, colleagues

I am privileged to be able to address you virtually today at the Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. That so many of you have been able to join despite this incredible period of turmoil, is clear testament to your commitment to a better planet for people everywhere.

I am so pleased to be able to open this meeting with some good news. Last night, we marked a true environmental milestone. The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, a vital instrument in global environmental cooperation for climate changing was ratified by Liberia – marking the 100th party ratification. Huge congratulations to Liberia and 99 other countries to this Amendment. I call on 98 others to follow suit and to help ensure a safer future for all of humanity.

As you may recall, we began the process of thinking about our next medium-term strategy in December 2019 and it was a very different world then. Today, as we advance our reflections on UNEP’s Medium Term Strategy for the period 2022 to 2025, we are at a critical juncture in history, one where we must forge a new framework for redefining the relationship between people and the earth.

As we stand at the crossroads of a world that has plunged into the worst recession in modern history, we carry with us, the tremendous responsibility of ensuring that our actions continue to be guided by the Rio+20 outcome document *The Future we Want* and Agenda 2030, to promote the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. This is the UNEP we want, the UNEP the world needs, and certainly the one we hope to get closer to, with our next four-year strategy, the contours of which I will outline today.

The triple planetary crisis – climate, nature, and pollution

The science is crystal clear that we are putting extreme pressures on the planet. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change(IPCC) estimates that global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052. Just last week in fact, the World Meteorological Organization and the UK’s Met Office brought this timeline even closer home, with new climate predictions that point to a 20 per cent likelihood that one of the next five years will be 1.5°C warmer than pre-industrial levels.

Our colleagues at the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) have sounded the alarm on the rapid decline of nature and what this means for Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity will undermine our efforts on 80 per cent of assessed SDG Targets, making it even more difficult to report progress on poverty, hunger, health, water, cities and climate. We need to look no further than the global pandemic caused by COVID-19, a zoonotic disease, i.e. transmitted from animal to human, to know that the finely-tuned system of the natural world has been disrupted. And finally, the “brown trail” of economic growth – pollution and waste which results every year, in the premature deaths of millions of people across the world.

The common thread, in a sense, that runs through this triple planetary crisis is unsustainable production and consumption. The International Resource Panel has consistently reminded us that our relentless and unlimited extraction of resources from the Earth, is having a devastating impact on the natural world, propelling climate change, destroying nature, and raising pollution levels.

Acting on this triple crisis should form the core of UNEP’s strategy for the next five years. These three programmes in turn will be sharpened and informed by our commitment to science for policy; and law and institutions that strengthen environmental governance. We seek to further enable change through transformations in finance and economic systems; and by leveraging data and technology for the environment.

Allow me, Excellencies to briefly outline key areas of focus.

Science as the catalyst for action

In this complex universe, UNEP will continue to be guided by the science that helps us understand the pressures on the environment. If science has taught us anything, it is that the environment can pull the rug from the economy and society at any time. But we seek not to produce science for science’s sake, but to deliver science that can strengthen the consensus on policymaking options, identify solutions, and guide actions for environmental sustainability, equipping us to address the planetary crisis.

Legal architecture for stronger environmental governance

At the same time, we cannot address the triple planetary crisis without laws and institutions that protect people, rights and the environment. Almost 90 per cent of all countries have frameworks for environmental law. Despite remarkable progress, implementation continues to be uneven and limited. UNEP aims to build national capacity to improve the effectiveness of these legal frameworks at the national, regional and global levels.

Repurposing finance and economic systems

The foundational levers I have outlined above, will be complemented by UNEP's work on repurposing and redirecting financial and economic systems towards sustainability. There is today greater recognition than ever before, that we can no longer pollute our way to wealth. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report for 2020 echoes this recognition. For the first time in the survey's 10-year outlook, five of the top ten global risks in terms of likelihood are all environmental. Relying on UNEP platforms including the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the UNEP Finance Initiative, and the One Planet Network, we aim to support efforts that align finance with sustainability. Our efforts can build a more resource-efficient industry, fuel green growth and economic development which provides green jobs, all with the goal of accelerating sustainable consumption and production.

Digital environmental cooperation

As you know, the UN Secretary-General recently launched the UN Data Strategy and the UN Road Map for Digital Cooperation. Both of these documents recognize the fundamental importance of data, insights and digital technologies to *"combat climate change while advancing global sustainability, environmental stewardship and human well-being"*. With less than a decade to shift the needle on environmental challenges, the scale, speed and impact we need to counter these existential threats, can be made possible through digital technologies that allow us to share environmental knowledge and insights. A practical application of our approach to digital transformation is the World Environment Situation Room. Through this digital platform we seek to provide real-time, actionable data and analysis as a contribution to the Common Country Analyses to be developed by the UN Country Teams. Nevertheless, we cannot let our enthusiasm for digital technologies blind us to the fact that only half the world is digitally connected. Our approach must be inclusive, diverse, and use a combination of high- and low-tech solutions.

Building muscle – gender, conflict

As we act on the seven programme areas I have outlined above, we will do so with the recognition of cross cutting themes that we intend to prioritise and integrate into our work. The uneven burden of environmental impact is borne by women, whether as food producers, environmental defenders, or those entrusted with securing water and fuel for the family.

Getting gender right will demand some fundamental shifts. Ensuring that UNEP data is genuinely gender differentiated; enhancing staff abilities to interpret what gender differentiated data would imply in terms of policy recommendations; operationalizing gender dimensions and non-discrimination issues in programme and project design; creating gender informed learning loops and so on.

Similarly, UNEP will continue to strengthen its work on the special needs of vulnerable states affected by disasters and conflicts, including through expertise in early warning and action; greater understanding of the linkages between climate and security and protecting nature as a tool for peace and resilience. This work is so important that we must mainstream it across the entire programme, clearly linking it to the triple planetary crisis because we know that

these challenges exacerbate the impacts of disasters and can help fuel conflict. And this work – as with all of UNEP’s work – can only succeed if it forms an integral part of UNEP’s engagement in the One UN, as part of the UN Secretary-General’s reform process.

Cooperation with multilateral environment agreements

UNEP is proud to be the “docking station” to and thus the host for, for 15 multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The MEAs are independent, but our mandates are strongly connected. We seek, therefore, to enhance cooperation with and support the MEAs. This, in turn will amplify UNEP’s voice, and enable us all, to collectively step up and respond to global environmental challenges whether through supporting the decisions made by our MEA family through in-country technical assistance, capacity building for implementation and so on. We recognize that the environmental mandate is only as strong as the sum of all parts.

Bigger environmental footprint through UN reform

UN Reform has given a big lift to UNEP’s work at the country-level. It provides us a unique opportunity to extend our environmental reach and increase our support to Member States and UN Country Teams in identifying and reflecting environmental priorities in common country assessments, and therefore the sustainable development frameworks at a country level.

Defining success

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. In a process spanning almost six months, through unique and numerous discovery and CPR sessions, we have listened to Member States. You have called on us to sharpen our focus. To bring greater coherence to our work. To do a better job of connecting the dots and breaking down the siloes that characterize global environmental cooperation.

This has guided the vision for UNEP’s next programme that we will outline over the next few hours. It is our intent that this new programme will help us deliver real, tangible and sustainable results for people, for prosperity and for equity everywhere. That it will help us deliver the science that can influence the kinds of action we need on the ground; to build platforms on a large and diverse scale that shift the needle on sustainability; and to build muscle on the ground, in-country, in support of environmental challenges and needs.

I thank you for the unprecedented level of engagement that has brought us thus far, and I look forward to the conversation we will be having today.