

## Multilateral solutions for the environment

*Speech prepared for delivery at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives*

*Ambassador Coimbra,*

*Excellencies, colleagues*

I am honored to welcome you to this virtual Annual Sub-Committee.

Our meeting takes place soon after an unusual General Assembly. Despite the challenges that we must overcome - as diplomacy seeks to stand its ground in this new virtual environment - I saw several encouraging signs for multilateralism and the environmental agenda. The UN Biodiversity Summit held at the conclusion of the General Assembly proved to be a remarkable moment for the nature agenda with more than 100 heads of state and government, and other senior officials speaking of biodiversity, conservation, monitoring, accountability, indigenous communities, and financing. My congratulations to all Member States that collectively contributed to making this a General Assembly that truly embraced nature and therefore, the interconnectedness of all life on the planet.

A second takeaway were the findings from the survey released at the General Assembly on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations. Excellencies, you may recall that in January this year, the UN Secretary-General launched the UN@75 initiative, kickstarting the world's largest conversation on global challenges, and the gap between the future we want and where we are headed if current trends continue. One million respondents reaffirmed the essential role of the United Nations in responding to global challenges, calling for more international cooperation, not less. The survey also pointed to overwhelming concerns on the climate crisis and the destruction of our natural environment. Responding to these findings, Member States [recommitted](#) to a reinvigorated multilateralism, noting that the “urgency for all countries to come together, to fulfil the promise of the nations united, has rarely been greater.”

Having said that, it is clear that in these complex times, we have some way to travel in arriving at a networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres summed up, “we face a surplus of multilateral challenges and a deficit of multilateral solutions.” Advancing the nature agenda will be a critical test for multilateralism. While we saw much momentum at the General Assembly and the UN Biodiversity Summit, I do not want to be over-optimistic. We must translate this momentum into a stronger Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework with commitment to implementation action at all levels. We must learn the lessons of the Aichi Targets, none of which, as the Convention on Biological Diversity alerted us this past month, will be achieved. And indeed, we must learn from the Paris Agreement on climate change and harness this knowledge and momentum to deliver a framework that unleashes transformational change to arrest biodiversity loss once and for all. We can achieve this through wise and sustainable use, through conservation and through benefit sharing, measuring our progress along the way.

Over the next few days, we will see how UNEP can be the platform for crafting broader multilateral solutions to some of the most pressing environmental challenges of the day. I look at our discussions over the next week into three categories. One, **we will look back** – with a deep dive into the programme performance review and the strides we have made to deliver across our seven sub-programmes in a difficult year. Two, **we will look at the “now”** – at the creation of an effective,

efficient and impactful formula for delivering the Fifth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5); at the launch of an online monitoring tool to showcase progress on the implementation of UNEA resolutions; and at strengthening our role as keepers of the environment under review. And three, ***we will look forward*** to the new Medium-Term Strategy (MTS); the Programme of Work (POW) and budget; preparations for UNEP@50; and the CPR-based review.

I commend the leadership demonstrated by the UNEA President and Bureau at its meeting last week which decided to support a “two-step approach” for UNEA-5. As we will hear from Ambassador Elin Rognlie, such an approach allows us to convene a virtual UNEA-5 in February 2021 on the dates previously agreed, with a revised and streamlined agenda. This session will be complemented by a second component, in the form of a resumed UNEA-5 to be held in-person in Nairobi in February 2022, in a format to be defined and agreed upon. I extend the full support of the Secretariat to ensure a successful and impactful UNEA-5, notwithstanding the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and I look forward to presenting you some ideas on how we can organize a virtual, streamlined UNEA in due course.

Allow me to say a few words about the MTS. I am very pleased to report that the development of the UNEP’s next MTS, POW and budget have progressed well. Excellencies, you have heard me speak to the three planetary crises which have continued unabated for decades. The climate crisis. The nature crisis. The pollution and waste crisis. Even as we continue to address the global pandemic, as it rises and ebbs across the world - the climate crisis; the nature crisis and the pollution crisis – show no signs of dissipating. And this is because our patterns of unsustainable production and consumption are eroding at a relentless speed, the natural foundations on which life and prosperity depend.

As we seek to enable a set of transformative shifts that can target the drivers of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, our approach is grounded in the fundamentals of gender equality, equity and human rights. And in this decade of action, in this decade that will shape how we live on the planet, our strategy will be guided by the global constellations of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs; the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework; and the Beyond 2020 Chemicals Framework. This is why the proposed MTS charts a path for UNEP to scale up impact. And we will take the MTS as the entry point to align our systems, operations, procedures and culture so that the whole of UNEP is greater than the sum of its parts.

So with this, I conclude my remarks. Excellencies, I thank you in advance, for all the hard work that will undoubtedly follow. I believe that our deliberations this week, our laser focus on finalizing a high-impact and meaningful MTS and POW, AND our shared commitment to a more sustainable planet, will allow us to respond to the Secretary-General’s call for an inclusive and networked multilateralism that meets the challenges we face ahead.

Thank you.