

**Speech by State Secretary for Infrastructure and Water Management
Stientje van Veldhoven**

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'An environmental paradigm shift'

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this leadership dialogue and allowing me to speak at this important gathering.

The concept note for this meeting states very clearly: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are closely interconnected and are the key challenges in a post-COVID recovery.

There is no vaccine against biodiversity loss and climate change, but they will be as life threatening if we do not come up with appropriate remedies.

So I wholeheartedly support the United Nations Environment Programme and its new strategy that puts sustainable consumption and production at the heart of a systems approach for recovery.

Close cooperation on a global level is essential to 'making peace with nature'. And UNEP is playing a key role here. By shaping the global environmental agenda and addressing some of the most urgent challenges ahead of us, such as the pollution of our oceans with marine plastic litter. We need more global action on these challenges.

But international cooperation won't succeed without the right measures at national and regional level. And without including and mobilising all parts of society, and young people in particular.

The Netherlands has ambitious plans. We have a lot of work to do:

- cleaning the air and thereby saving thousands of lives. That's why we've signed a national Clean Air Agreement;
- protecting our nature and biodiversity. We aim to drastically reduce pollution, cut nitrogen emissions, increase nature reserves and protect habitats;

- reducing the amount of waste. That's why we're promoting circular initiatives;
- closing the loop of the circular economy. That's why we will be an active partner in the Global Alliance for the Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency, initiated by the European Commission. And that's also why we support PACE, the Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy;
- reshaping our relationship with plastic. That's why I initiated a national Plastic Pact, and –with my French counterpart – a European Plastic Pact;
- and making our industries and production 'safe and circular by design'.

These points are the essence of the National Environment Policy Framework we recently launched.

The core of the framework is to better link a pro-active and ambitious environmental agenda with human health and people's everyday quality of life, by preventing environmental damage before it occurs, instead of fixing it afterwards.

An enormous challenge, for us in the Netherlands, and globally.

Dear friends,

One last remark:

On April 15th and 16th, we hope to welcome you all to the World Circular Economy Forum + Climate.

This conference will focus on the essential contribution of the circular economy to achieving the world's climate ambitions. For several branches we're talking about almost 50 percent CO2 reduction!

And it will propose a way forward involving concrete actions.

Actions that will allow us – together with partners like UNEP – to make peace with nature again.

Thank you.