

Committee of Permanent Representatives  
Subcommittee Meeting  
Thursday 4 March 2021  
3:00 p.m. –6:00 p.m. (GMT+3)  
Online Meeting

### **Agenda Item 3: inputs of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.**

In paragraph 3 of UNEA resolution 3/3<sup>1</sup>, the United Nations Environment Assembly decided to “provide timely substantive inputs to the annual meetings of the high-level political forum, including during the intersessional period between the biennial sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly, as follows: (a) The inputs will be provided on the overarching environmental perspective of sustainable development; (b) The inputs will take into account the themes of meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development as well as the Sustainable Development Goals under review at each of the annual meetings of the forum, as well as the interlinkages between the environmental dimension and the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development; (c) The inputs will also take into account relevant resolutions adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly; (d) The inputs will be prepared by the Executive Director or the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme, under the guidance of the President of the Environment Assembly, in consultation with and for consideration by the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Based on the mandate provide in UNEA resolution 3/3, the secretariat has prepared a draft inputs of the UN Environment Assembly to this year’s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). HLPF 2021 will take place from 6 to 15 July 2021, with a ministerial segment from 13 to 15 July 2021, under the theme “*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*”.

The attached draft inputs have been prepared in response to the request in a [letter dated 18 November 2020 from H.E. Mr. Munir Akram](#), President of ECOSOC and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN in New York, to H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of the United Nations Environment Assembly and Minister for the Environment and Climate of Norway. The letter outlines specific guidance as to which aspects should be addressed in the contribution.

In line with guidance provide by Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives at its [meeting on 12 January 2021](#), the draft has taken into account inputs from the following Member States who provided written submissions to the secretariat by 12 February 2021: Colombia, Senegal, Serbia, India, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and the European Union. It also builds on relevant background documents relating to the COVID-19 prepared by the UNEP secretariat.

Member States are invited to and provide further guidance on the draft contributions of the UN Environment Assembly to the 2021 HLPF.

<sup>1</sup> Available here: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/unea3>

## **Inputs of the UN Environment Assembly to the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**

The inputs build on submissions in writing from several Member States submitted to the secretariat in February 2021, as well as the UNEP report "Working with the environment to protect people: COVID-19 Response"<sup>2</sup> and other relevant documents issued by the UNEP secretariat, including the Medium Term Strategy for UNEP 2022-2025 entitled "For people and planet: the United Nations Environment Programme strategy for 2022–2025 to tackle climate change, loss of nature and pollution" (UNEP/EA.5/3/Rev.1)<sup>3</sup>.

### ***(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs;***

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is instrumental in providing guidance to promote that all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are incorporated into recovery efforts, bearing in mind the integrated nature of the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is also a humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis. The current COVID-19 pandemic is also a reminder of the intimate relationship among humans, animals and the environment. The transmission pathways of diseases, such as COVID-19, from animals to humans highlight the extent to which humans are placing pressures on the natural world with damaging consequences for all. A detailed assessment of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) from the vantage point of the environmental dimension of Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other Sustainable Development Goals, is presented in [Annex 1](#).

### ***(b) Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body;***

A vision for planetary sustainability for people, prosperity and equity requires addressing our common environmental challenges – climate change, pollution and nature loss – through action in three interlinked and mutually reinforcing strategic objectives: climate stability, living in harmony with nature and achieving a pollution-free planet. These objectives can be achieved by working towards the following outcomes:

1. By adopting decarbonization, dematerialization and resilience pathways; by increasing capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on the adaptations and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement; and by adopting the enhanced transparency framework arrangements under the Paris Agreement.
2. By establishing an economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem integrity;
3. By enhancing the capacity and leadership in achieving sound management of chemicals and waste; by improving waste management, including through circular processes; and by reducing the release of pollutants to air, water, soil and the ocean.
4. By promoting the implementation of internationally agreed environmental commitments in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and an effective global governance system informed by an open and inclusive environmental multilateralism.
5. By supporting the "One Health" approach, as recognized in paragraphs 24 and 33 of UNEA resolution 3/4<sup>4</sup> entitled "Environment and Health".
6. By supporting an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity as a key element in achieving the SDGs.

### ***(c) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global, regional and national levels against of background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by your intergovernmental bodies;***

All over the world, the poor and marginalized (e.g. women, children, racial and ethnic minorities) continue to be those most vulnerable to the impacts of environmental risks. Protecting those most at risk needs to be central to our COVID-

---

<sup>2</sup> Available here: <https://www.unep.org/covid-19>

<sup>3</sup> Available here: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/pre-session-documents-unea-5>

<sup>4</sup> Available here: <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/unea3>

19 response and recovery measures. This means putting inclusion and embedding intergenerational equity and gender equality more systematically across all planning and response measures. To effectively meet the needs of vulnerable people and communities, we must address the multiple, intersecting exclusions that they face. An inclusive, intergenerational approach to data, analysis and policy making should be science-based, and engage every part of our societies.

***(d) Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;***

Environmental challenges, just like the challenges posed by the COVID 19 pandemic on our health systems worldwide, require global action and the creation of partnerships. Just as the vaccine development has broken some conventions regarding international cooperation, we must also think beyond national interests and borders regarding environmental challenges to identify innovative solutions. Among other initiatives that can leverage the opportunities for enhanced cooperation are the following:

1. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), as mandated by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 73/284 of 1 March 2019<sup>5</sup>, with the aim to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation and accelerate existing restoration efforts across ecosystems;
2. Policy proposals for delivering a green, inclusive and resilient recovery from the working Group on “Recovering Better for Sustainability”, under the 2020 Financing for the Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative<sup>6</sup>;
3. The Online Platform for Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from COVID-19<sup>7</sup>, which showcase policies and actions taken by national governments toward a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19;
4. The Green Recovery Support Programme under the Partnership for Action on Green Economy<sup>8</sup>, which supports a number of countries to green the food supply and agriculture systems for creating jobs and income for small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples and family farmers;
5. The 10-year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production and One Planet Network can be leveraged to support multilateral collaboration to scale up SDG 12 which is key to addressing the planetary crises and COVID 19 recovery.

***(e) Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;***

1. Policy options that would help reduce and address pandemic risk:
  - Consider the “One Health” approach, as recognized in paragraph 24 and 33 of UNEA resolution 3/4 entitled “Environment and Health” to build pandemic preparedness, enhance pandemic prevention programs, and to investigate and control outbreaks across sectors.
  - Leverage circularity as a tool to address global supply chain disruptions in times of crisis can help create economic and social resilience.
  - Improve the capacity to programme and perform actions to achieve the long-term vision inspired by the 2030 Agenda; strengthening policy coherence for sustainable development will be crucial to ensure the fulfilment of these objectives.
2. Policy options to promote sustainable consumption and production:
  - Promote the development, effectiveness and uptake of innovative sustainable business models, in line with paragraph 4 of UNEA Resolution 4/1<sup>9</sup>;
  - Develop sustainable public procurement policies in accordance with their commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 12.7, in line with paragraph 8 of UNEA Resolution 4/1;

---

<sup>5</sup> Available here: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/73/284>

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/financing-development>

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://platform2020redesign.org/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.un-page.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Available here: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/proceedings-report-ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4>

- Support education and raise awareness of the importance of sustainable consumption, sustainable lifestyles and sustainable consumer behavior, and those that develop related skills for academia and the private sector, including the financial sector, in line with paragraph 10 of UNEA Resolution 4/1.
3. An action agenda to harness the potential of innovative financing opportunities:
    - Developing enabling macroeconomic and sectoral policies that contribute to sustainable development, in line with paragraph 1 of UNEA Resolution 4/4,<sup>10</sup> as well as responsible value chains;
    - Developing and strengthening sustainable financing mechanisms, such as green bonds, to promote the inclusion of sustainability in business for the uptake and upscaling of sustainable business approaches, in line with paragraph 1 of UNEA Resolution 4/1, including but not limited to green business practices.
  4. Recommendations to scale-up climate action:
    - The 2021 Climate Change Conference will be an opportunity to bring leaders together to deliver commitments on mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance, with consideration to the need to safeguard nature's contribution to people and ecosystem services, biodiversity and strengthening land tenure rights, land use planning and management, and with a particular emphasis on the vulnerability of people living in rural areas as well as their context-specific knowledge and contribution to the cause.
    - Reconvening of the “Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (informally the “Climate & SDGs Synergy Conference”), could be an opportunity to align processes of climate action and the SDGs in order to stimulate action of stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels and to maximize co-benefits.

***(f) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2021 HLPF.***

Building on the elements outlined in prior sections of this document, the following key messages may be considered as part of the 2021 HLPF Ministerial Declaration:

1. Welcome the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 and encourage Member States to accelerate action for support;
2. Reiterate the need for action on biodiversity protection, conservation and sustainable use, climate change, sustainable consumption and production and sound management of chemicals and waste, including by improving waste management as part of the sustainable recovery efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic;
3. Invite Member States to support frameworks and networks to achieve the targets of SDG 12, as a strategic approach to promote sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19;
4. Invite Member States to promote sustainable and innovative financing opportunities and mechanisms to unlock new capital for sustainable investment and to upscale sustainable business models, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises;
5. Invite Member States to scale up global climate action through solidarity, collaboration, and global collective leadership;
6. Invite Member States to support the development of metrics which capture environment, sustainability and the principle of equity when assessing growth.

\* \* \*

Annex 1: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 High Level Political Forum from the vantage point of environmental dimension of sustainable development, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs

---

<sup>10</sup> Available here: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/proceedings-report-ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4>

**Annex 1: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 High Level Political Forum from the vantage point of environmental dimension of sustainable development, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs.**

Considering the theme and the set of SDGs to be reviewed in-depth by the HLPF in 2021<sup>11</sup>, the following impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted from the vantage point of environmental dimension of sustainable development, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs.

1. Biodiversity and ecosystem conservation are core to achieving SDG 1 - No Poverty- and SDG 2 –Zero Hunger. The effects on extreme poverty, particularly in countries that already have high poverty rates, have risen markedly due to severe COVID-19 related global economic contractions around the globe. In many countries, the indirect health, humanitarian and economic impacts of the pandemic are being felt more strongly than the direct health impacts, particularly as they are exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and reversing years of development gains. With COVID-19 pushing more people in poverty, increased hunger and reduced work opportunities may increase land use pressures and practices that which may undermine biodiversity and ecosystem integrity.
2. Environment and health, including health inequalities, impact on SDG 3 -Good Health and Well-being<sup>12</sup>. Healthy ecosystems help to mitigate air, water and soil pollution, and are the source of both modern and traditional medicines. Forest loss and other land use changes caused by unsustainable agricultural intensification and urbanization have been identified as one of the main anthropogenic drivers of zoonoses. As such, ecosystem conservation and sustainable natural resources management can significantly reduce the risk of future outbreaks of zoonotic diseases.
3. Recession and job losses are impacting on SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth. COVID-19 and efforts to contain it have led to one of the most serious recessions in recent history, characterized by, among others, a decline in economic growth, decreased trade, low business revenues and massive layoffs<sup>13</sup>. On example is tourism, one of the sectors most affected, which places jobs at risk and has already led to a rise in poaching, looting and in consumption of bushmeat, partly due to the decreased presence of tourists and staff<sup>14</sup>. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, more than 25 million jobs across the infrastructure sector have been lost or were at risk of being lost in the short term. A focus on green renovation of buildings has a job creation potential of 9-30 jobs per 1 million USD invested (greater than most other sectors) and helps improve living conditions<sup>15</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated deforestation pressures and heightened the urgency of action. It has also generated a range of additional risks that result in significant increase of deforestation, including weakened law enforcement, increased illegal activities in forests and concerns on deregulation and relaxation of environmental laws. Lockdowns have led to disruptions in markets and supply chain and caused job losses, triggering reverse migration into rural areas and increased pressure on forests to provide for subsistence livelihoods. Nonetheless, the current pandemic also gives us an opportunity to reshape our economic system and adopt a path that will lead us to sustainable outcomes.
4. On the implementation of SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities, the socio-economic distress resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is now exacerbating and deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, economic, and biodiversity systems, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. The degradation of ecosystems has different impacts at the macro and micro level. At the micro level, it leads to the erosion of the resource base and environmental services. Viewed from an “equity” perspective, the poverty of their beneficiaries makes these ecosystem service losses even more significant as a proportion of their incomes

---

<sup>11</sup> The HLPF in 2021 will discuss Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth-

<sup>12</sup> UNEA Resolution 3/4. Environment and Health. Para, 2,

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/policy/wesp-mid-2020-report.html>

<sup>14</sup> UNWTO. Tourism and COVID-19 Unprecedented Impacts. Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-covid-19-unprecedented-economic-impacts>

<sup>15</sup> See, United Nations Environment Programme (2020). 2020 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction: Towards a Zero-emission, Efficient and Resilient Buildings and Construction Sector. Nairobi. Available here: [https://globalabc.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2020%20Buildings%20GSR\\_FULL%20REPORT.pdf](https://globalabc.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2020%20Buildings%20GSR_FULL%20REPORT.pdf)

and livelihoods. Poverty, where it leads to degradation of natural capital to support needs, reduces the services generated by ecosystems which, with lack of investment resources, leads to more poverty, thus creating a vicious circle.

5. Regarding SDG 12 -Sustainable consumption and production-, it is clear that many zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 are linked to unsustainable consumption and production practices. UNEA resolution 4/1 called to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation and primary resource consumption<sup>16</sup> and, in the context of post COVID-19 recovery as countries are looking to ‘build back better’, measuring capital stocks through wealth accounts will be imperative, with particular focus on reducing the degradation of ecosystem health which underpins natural capital.
6. Regarding the implementation of SDG 13 – Climate action, the measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus have slowed economic activities and therefore led to a transitory reduction in GHG emissions worldwide. However, this is not caused by structural transformations and economic recovery might prompt emissions to pre-pandemic levels or even worse. This is why we need to recover better and greener, making sure to mainstream environmental and sustainability criteria throughout all recovery policy measures. The impacts of climate change are right before us and COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges, particularly for small islands: Cyclical changes in the climate require farmers and fishers to adjust in facing the uncertainties; rising sea levels require coastal and small island populations to persevere; increasing frequency of natural disasters, including floods and droughts, require people to stay alert, among other challenges. Decisive and ambitious action to combat climate change and biodiversity loss remain an urgent necessity.

---

<sup>16</sup> Operative paragraph 1. UNEA resolution 4/1, “Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production”.