

Statement by Stephen Stec- Major Groups Science and Technology

Closing Plenary

23 February 2021

UNEP@50

Good day to everyone. Thank you, Chair, for the introduction.

My name is Stephen Stec, one of the representatives of the S&T Major Group, from Central European University in Austria and Hungary, and lead of the MGS Task Force on UNEP@50.

The year 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the UN Environment Programme at Stockholm during the UN Conference on the Human Environment – an occasion for celebration as well as reflection on UNEP’s key accomplishments over the last half-century. and an opportunity to look forward to UNEP’s future.

As we heard from the UNEA President at the GMGSF, the work of UNEP would have been impossible without the deep and constant engagement of MGS in agenda-setting, policy development, and implementation. This has been understood since UNEP’s very beginning. Stockholm was the first UN meeting at which civil society organizations had the right to address the Member States directly.

The Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future,” which, in 1987, presented to the world the concept of Sustainable Development - said

“Scientific groups and NGOs have played - with the help of young people - a major part in the environmental movement from its earliest beginnings. ... **Making the difficult choices involved in achieving sustainable development will depend on the widespread support and involvement of an informed public and of NGOs, the scientific community, and industry.**”

MGS welcome UNEP’s engagement with civil society in the UNEP@50 process, based upon Decision 4/2 at UNEA 4, which calls for UNEP to undertake broad outreach efforts to strengthen the active engagement of civil society and the general public, .. in the commemoration activities, with a view to empower them to influence and feel ownership for UNEP@50.

At the same time, MGS have embarked upon our own commemorative process leading towards a report on “The UNEP We Want” to be presented at UNEA 5.2.

As a first step we have conducted a Snapshot Survey, which many of you have contributed to.

The results of our Snapshot Survey show deep appreciation for UNEP's past achievements as well as great expectations for an enhanced role for UNEP in the future.

Looking back – a few things stand out –

- **Major policy achievements such as the Montreal Protocol, Minimata Convention**
- UNEA itself – despite its universality being a big step forward, **UNEP and UNEA are still somewhat invisible to the general public**
- 70% said that UNEP's MGS and CSO engagement changed over time **for the better**

Looking forward – 3 highlights –

- Almost 80% of the respondents consider that UNEP should have a stronger mandate, more authority and greater resources
- 97% think that UNEP should have a voice in coordinating the environmental programmes of other UN agencies, funds and programmes to reduce overlapping mandates and duplication of activities.
- The same number think that UNEP has a special role to play post-pandemic in a Green Recovery

MGSs also anxiously await the final outcome of UNGA Resolution 73/333, which represents an opportunity to highlight and endorse a new global consensus in the context of UNEP@50, beyond a mere declaration towards an Action Plan on the effective implementation and enforcement of environmental law with means of implementation.

These are important initial findings, but it's only the beginning of a process that will proceed throughout the coming year –

During 2021 we will conduct four global consultations based on the survey results and will also conduct a more detailed substantive survey,

Culminating in **"The UNEP We Want"** -

You have heard the key messages of the Youth Environment Assembly, the most connected, most scientifically literate, and most environmentally aware generation in human history. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in 1999: "A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

UNEP's 50th birthday is occurring while human life on Earth is suffering from another great challenge. With the COVID Pandemic, Nature is reminding us of its power, majesty and ultimately its awesomeness. Our friend from Ladakh in India mentioned that COVID has been the most effective climate policy response ever. The pandemic – nature – got us to do things in one year that our leaders have failed at for decades.

Do no harm.

Building back better means also dismantling those things that are harmful

But in a way that is just and equitable and takes care of all who are vulnerable and dislocated

Guided by the science-policy interface

Global leaders have to lead us there

If they can't, the people will do it themselves.

Whether people wish to admit it, the tensions arising from urgent concerns about the world's environmental and energy future are at the root of today's chaotic and sometimes violent popular political processes, as they were in 1989, and as they are in many countries around the world today. The people are challenging governance-as-usual. ... And systems of governance have to respond. ...

UNEP has to serve us in getting there. What role does UNEP have to play in: Inclusiveness, environmental justice, and giving purpose to our restless and impatient youth?

The Major Groups and Stakeholders commemorative process leading towards a **report on "The UNEP We Want"** has these questions in mind.

A UNEP which cannot continue to do business as usual, or governance-as-usual.

SO We INVITE Member States, MGs and stakeholders, IGOs, governmental authorities, and ordinary people to work together with us --- as we proceed towards The UNEP We Want. – the UNEP that we, the People want and need going forward.

Thank you for your attention.