

**The resumed session of UNEA 5 -  
5th Session of the  
United Nations Environment Assembly**

**1 March 2022**



**Statement by  
H.E. Ms Leonore GEWESSLER  
Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy,  
Mobility, Innovation and Technology  
Republic of AUSTRIA**

Mr President, Executive Director, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

*Austria aligns itself with the opening statement delivered by H.E. Virginijus Sinkevičius on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, condemning the act of unprovoked and unjustified military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. We urge Russia to stop further bloodshed, immediately withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine and return to the path of peaceful dialogue. In these difficult times we assure the Ukrainian people of our strongest solidarity.*

I really would have preferred to be in Nairobi right now, but because of the current situation, it is unfortunately not possible for me to take part in person in this important meeting.

The climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution are the main challenges of humankind and put the survival and well-being of current and future generations at risk.

Strong and effective multilateralism, I am convinced, is the best approach to dealing with these challenges. We need to work together to overcome the multiple crises and UNEP is well suited to lead global efforts.

We have no time to lose and need to act also at national level. In Austria, we put huge emphasis on catching up on our climate commitments. Our goal is to achieve climate neutrality by 2040.

Since last year in Austria, we have implemented several measures. One important measure to support those who travel with public transport I would like to highlight: the KlimaTicket. Everybody can use ALL public transport in Austria - every bus, train, subway, tram - with ONE single ticket at an affordable price. At the same time, public transport infrastructure is expanded and improved.

We are currently also elaborating the new biodiversity strategy which will be finalized ahead of the COP15 of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), where we will hopefully adopt ambitious and transformative global biodiversity goals this year.

The need to reduce plastic, including marine litter and micro plastic, is a matter of great importance to my Ministry as well. That is why we work on an action plan to reduce micro plastic and a strategy for circular economy.

Experience, however, shows that voluntary initiatives alone are not sufficient. That is why we are currently also developing mandatory refund systems for plastic bottles and cans in

order to increase recycling of these materials. Therefore, Austria also supports the start of negotiations for a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution at the international level. Such an instrument should in any case cover the entire life cycle of plastic material in order to promote a circular economy approach.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The triple planetary crisis influences certain ecosystems more than others, for example mountain regions. Besides the climate crisis, that is affecting our glaciers and their water runoff and the biodiversity crisis affecting fragile mountain ecosystems, also pollution has become a global issue in the mountain regions. Tackling the source of plastic pollution at high altitude is urgently needed.

In this context, we are also very proud to host the UNEP Vienna Office, which has built a strong mountain network in support of the UNEP Medium Term Strategy and supports UNEP programme delivery at the country level in the Western Balkans.

You can be assured of our overall continuous support to UNEP and, of course, in particular also to the UNEP Vienna office.

In closing, I would like to stress that UNEP as the leading global environmental authority is well suited to set the global environmental agenda and promote coherent implementation. Let me therefore congratulate UNEP wholeheartedly on its 50th anniversary!

Thank you.