

**Special Session
of the United Nations Environment Assembly
to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment
of the United Nations Environment Programme
(UNEP@50)**



**Statement
H.E. Mr Alexander Van der Bellen
Federal President
Republic of Austria**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends!

I really would have loved to be in Nairobi, the “green city in the sun”, with you right now. Unfortunately, the pandemic situation in Austria prevents me from coming to UNEP@50.

Fifty years ago, in 1972, the Stockholm conference for environment and development was the starting point and foundation of UNEP. The mood at the time was optimistic. There was belief that we could stop or at least slow down environmental degradation.

Since then, UNEP was instrumental for the development of international environmental law and for the initiation of many multilateral environmental agreements.

Over years and decades, environmental, social and economic aspects were taken into account.

Much has been achieved: Today, we have the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity. The Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer and its Montreal Protocol have proven to be successful.

On the other hand, the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and plastic pollution are huge, present-day challenges. The world has to act faster than ever before.

UNEP is the environmental authority in the UN system and contributes to tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate, nature, and pollution.

Austria will continue to support UNEP – at its headquarters in Nairobi, with regional activities, and at the Programme Office in Vienna.

Our environment needs a strong voice. We need a strong UN Environment Programme for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I hope to see you all very soon, in Nairobi or elsewhere. But first, let us celebrate – Happy Birthday, UNEP!

Let there be many more successful years in environmental protection around the world!