Contribution to the preparation of the ministerial declaration for the sixth United Nations Environment Assembly on "Effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution"

In follow-up to the kind invitation from H.E. Ms. Leila Benali, President of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) and Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development of Morocco, the World Federation for Animals is pleased to present its contribution to the consultations on the draft UNEA 6 ministerial declaration.

The Zero draft ministerial declaration for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly is characterized by a lack of ambition, an absence of reflection on progress achieved since previous sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly (particularly UNEA 5.2), and a continuing need for a clear determination of what constitutes transformative change.

While acknowledging that the zero draft is only a first step in the process and will be improved beyond restating a commitment by Member States to achieve agreed goals and targets related to climate change, biodiversity and pollution, it is our hope that the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly will advance a new and common perspective on how real transformative change can be achieved and to see this reflected in the ministerial declaration.

Below we offer some thoughts on what constitutes effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral action in this regard for consideration by UNEP and Member States:

Effective

The global effort to combat climate change highlights the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly. The recent IPCC sixth assessment report notes that emissions need to be halved by 2030 to limit global warming to 1.5˚C. For this gargantuan task to be achievable it will be crucial that the Earth's major carbon sinks at least retain their current carbon sequestration capacity. In this regard, UNEP and others note that defaunation, involving the reduction of terrestrial and marine vertebrate animals as a result of hunting, fishing, trade and habitat loss, significantly erodes carbon capture and the carbon storage capacity of our forests and oceans.[i] Recent studies[iii] have estimated that approximately half of the carbon capture capacity of forests and oceans, equivalent to 60 percent of global anthropogenic emissions[iiii],

are directly threatened by the overexploitation of terrestrial and marine wildlife and limitations to their free movement. As such the protection of terrestrial and marine wildlife and their habitats must be an integral part of the climate change effort.

With regard to the issue of biodiversity loss, the 2019 global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)[iv] has determined that "*for terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, land-use change has had the largest relative negative impact on nature since 1970 followed by the direct exploitation, in particular overexploitation of animals, plants and other organisms. Agricultural expansion, particularly to sustain industrial livestock systems, is the most widespread driver of land-use change*." Therefore, if the systems of production and consumption that rely on the inhumane use of animals are the dominant drivers of biodiversity loss, it follows logically that the integration of animal welfare as an essential policy concern will contribute significantly to efforts to arrest biodiversity loss and work towards the restoration and regeneration of global ecosystems.

With regard to pollution there is a growing consensus that altered biochemical cycles (phosphorus and nitrogen) have exceeded their planetary boundaries to the greatest extent. A key contributor to and accelerator of nutrient waste in recent decades has been the increasing intensification and industrialization of agriculture, particularly the livestock sector as well as the crop sector which is increasingly dedicated to producing crops for animal feed. As there is equally a growing consensus that technological fixes to chemical fertilizers and their usage will be insufficient to reverse current trends, it follows that only a transformation of food systems towards more regenerative, nature-based and humane systems will stand a chance of successfully stemming the tide. A transformative and decisive advance on UNEA resolution 5/2 during UNEA 6 will be essential in this regard.

Inclusive

Goal A of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework reflects the global consensus that the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems must be maintained, enhanced or restored. To maintain the ability of ecosystems to provide the services on which all human beings depend will require an increased understanding of what the constituent elements of ecosystems are and how these elements interact and to take the necessary action to avoid or minimize anthropogenic pressures that have a destructive impact on individual elements of ecosystems and their interactions. Animals, as the most dynamic element of ecosystems, require special attention in this regard. Animals are crucial for pollination and therefore the natural regeneration of ecosystems. Animals, as sentient beings, are also doubly susceptible to anthropogenic pressures (directly and indirectly as a result of stress), which, as we have all experienced in recent years, has led to an increasing prevalence and intensity of zoonotic disease emergence and an increasing risk of pandemics. The inclusion of the protection and promotion of the health and welfare of animals is therefore an essential policy concern and warrants enhanced attention at UNEA 6.

Promoting the One Health approach is an important step in this regard. The One Health approach recognizes that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent. UNEA resolution 5/1 called on the UNEP Executive Director to work in partnership with UNEP's quadripartite partners on matters related to animal welfare and its nexus with human health and the environment through a One Health approach. Advancing the collective understanding of the nexus and an exploration of what further steps are needed to promote animal welfare at UNEA 6 will be essential and reflective of the desire to be inclusive.

Sustainable

With the UN General Assembly's adoption of 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Member States "committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner". With this, Member States redefined the concept of sustainable development by i) clarifying that the three dimensions of sustainable development are one integrated whole, ii) elevating the protection of the environment to equal the need for economic prosperity and social progress; and iii) determining that progress across the three dimensions can only be achieved in a balanced and concurrent manner.

As UNEP, FAO, WHO, WOAH, CFS, UNDRR, as well as all Member States in UNEA resolution 5/1, have acknowledged that animal welfare produces direct beneficial outcomes for many of the SDGs, the protection of the environment and the advancement of human health, it is now apparent that the promotion of animal welfare is an important example of the core principle underpinning the Sustainable Development Agenda, namely policy coherence and is essential for an integrated and balanced approach to sustainability. As such, it must be emphasized that animal welfare must be considered in order to provide a comprehensive analysis and understanding of sustainability challenges. In this regard, it is regrettable that UNEP has taken insufficient action to implement UNEA resolution 5/1 and we call on all Member States to use UNEA 6 to urge UNEP to produce a report on the animal welfare – environment – sustainable development nexus.

In close relation to this it will also be important for UNEA 6 to heed the call by the UN Secretary-General in "Our Common Future"[v] to *urgently find measures of progress that complement GDP* and *that account for planetary sustainability*. The valuation of nature is crucial to ensure that the true value of nature and all that it inhabits is taken into account when developing policies to secure economic prosperity or social progress. Within such a context, animal welfare will unavoidably be regarded as an investment that provides positive direct benefits across all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Conclusion and initial language suggestions

The issue of animal welfare and its positive direct benefits for achieving sustainable development, addressing environmental challenges and promoting the One Health approach was first acknowledged by Member States at UNEA 5.2 in its UNEA resolution 5/1 on the animal welfare – environment – sustainable development nexus. It's importance to deliver on

the theme for UNEA 6 and identify and commit to effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions has only become more urgent and clearer since then.

For UNEA 6 to be successful, UNEP and Member States should use the upcoming session to move the overall narrative from acknowledging the need for fundamental transformative change to identifying what transformative change is needed and how it can be achieved. It will also need to shift its perspective from a predominantly people-centered approach to one where the environment and its constituent parts, particularly animals and their welfare, are equally valued and perceived as vectors for progress rather than challenges to be addressed.

In this regard, we strongly urge Member States to ensure that UNEP delivers on UNEA resolution 5/1 and to provide UNEP with the investment that will allow it to do so.

In light of the above we, at this stage, propose the following language additions to the text of the UNEA 6 ministerial declaration Zero draft:

> 7. We are aware that in order to revitalize the multilateral system and inspire decisive and collective action to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution we surely need to reinforce global inclusiveness and solidarity, **clarify the transformative change needed and reinforce the shift to a more balanced and integrated approach that values the environmental dimension equally to the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development.**
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> 8a. promote sustained global efforts to address climate change in line with the principles of the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, including by **securing the carbon capture capacity of natural carbon sinks,** addressing the urgent need for scaled up action for adaptation and resilience as well as loss and damage. We will spare no effort to protect our communities against natural disasters induced or exacerbated by climate change, such as drought, famine, and flooding, recognizing the devastating impacts these phenomena have on societies, economies, and ecosystems.
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> 8b. combat biodiversity loss in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, by urgently reversing ecosystem decline, **securing the integrity of ecosystems and protection of its constituent elements,** promoting and strengthening ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, while mitigating and adapting to climate change and boosting resilience, supporting sustainable food production, promoting One Health and ensuring equitable benefits across economies and societies through robust safeguards and policies for environmental and social protection.
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> **8g. Deploy greater efforts, as well as mobilize and allocate adequate resources towards the implementation of UNEA resolution 5/1 and urge UNEP to adopt an evidence-based, science-led and fully consultative process to report on the animal welfare – environment – sustainable development nexus.**

[i] https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/business-unusual-how-fish-carbon-stabilizes-our-climate

[ii] Bello, Carolina & Galetti, Mauro & Pizo, Marco & Luiz, Fernando & Magnago, Luiz & Rocha, Mariana & Lima, Renato & Peres, Carlos & Ovaskainen, Otso & Jordano, Pedro. (2015). Defaunation affects carbon storage in tropical forests. Science Advances. 1. e1501105. 10.1126/sciadv.1501105 - https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/11/e1501105

[iii] IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf

[iv] IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf

[v] https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda