

Recommendations of the NGO Major Group

Assembly (UNEA4) of the United Nations Environment (UNEP) and the eighth Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF17)

Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)

- (a) environmental challenges related to poverty and natural resources management, including sustainable food systems, food security and halting biodiversity loss;
(b) life-cycle approaches to resource efficiency, energy, chemicals and waste management; and
(c) innovative sustainable business development at a time of rapid technological change.

There are 5 clusters of resolutions:

1. Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and SCP
2. Resource efficiency, chemicals and waste
3. Ecosystems and biodiversity management and protection
4. Environmental governance
5. UNEP Programme of Work (PoW)

Introduction

We, the accredited Non-Governmental Organizations Major Group, are very much concerned that the concept of sustainable development is shifting from being a fundamental goal for changing the current economic and political system, into policies to continue “Business as Usual” with a green sauce. Our position is that we need a new development paradigm that prioritizes the flourishing of humans, nature, and animals.

As we have reiterated for decades, we need a paradigm shift in thinking and acting, that stops production and consumption patterns based on unsustainable natural extraction, pollution and exploitation of humans, the environment and animals. A main problem lies on the fact that the current political and economic systems totally ignore the functioning of the Earth System and the interactions among its two components: the biosphere and the geosphere. Acknowledgement of planetary boundaries are still not reflected in public policies.

We stress the importance of dealing with the root causes of environmental crises, and taking a grassroots approach. Dealing with symptoms and end-of-pipe solutions is not the answer.

Wars, occupation, and armed conflicts are growing and resulting in millions of men, women and children ending up as refugees and prisoners.

In many places freedom of speech is restricted, and NGOs and environmental defenders are persecuted, punished and sometimes even killed. NGOs are still not considered as partners in decision making processes, and not given the right to access information. In some regions “Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs)” are created to undermine the work of true NGOs.

We applaud the topic of innovative solutions for environmental challenges and SCP as this brings us to the core of possible solutions. But only if we see this as part of the systemic change we require. In the following paragraphs we follow the logic of the groupings of the UNEA-4 resolutions.

1. Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production:

Innovation is not just the design and production of new things, new products or new means of consumption. Technological or product innovation alone will not decouple us from the excessive resource use and massive environmental degradation that is breaching our planetary boundaries.

Technological innovation is not a panacea or magic bullet. Nor will it alone lead to the social and economic changes that humanity desperately needs.

In addition, even where innovation is limited to new technologies, it must not be restricted to new products, but must also address how all products are produced and within their entire lifecycle.

Societal solutions must be built from the bottom up, making use of local and indigenous knowledge, and built through meaningful engagement and the development of understanding, awareness and trust. There are no easy solutions. Advocating novel solutions to environmental challenges should proceed on the basis of a simple test:

- Firstly, does the innovation do no harm to the environment, humans and animals, now and in the future? (precautionary principle)
- Secondly, does it address the need for inclusive development, justice and equity ?
- And finally, does your proposed approach already exist? If so, first apply transfer of technology to the groups needed, and/or upscale it via policy measures and/or financial investments.

Furthermore, it is not enough just to identify and promote an idea without also addressing the societal conditions or infrastructure that it needs to flourish. We require holistic and just approaches, informed by and sympathetic to the local context.

SCP as leverage towards system change

- Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and should also become a central issue in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted by the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2020. For its realisation we need a fundamental change of the production chain to make it sustainable and fair. Our current economic system is based on the unsustainable extractivism of natural resources, externalized costs and the exploitation of cheap labour and low environmental and social standards.
- We urge governments to build on the progress already made under the One Planet Network, formally the 10YFP on SCP, and to reiterate their support for the programmes through national policy changes and the allocation of resources. As we witness the growing demand for more ethical and sustainable business practices, consumers must be empowered with accessible and clear information on the sustainability of a product. For example, these include certification schemes that promote fair trade, sustainable forest, organic, animal welfare-friendly and toxic-free products. We call on governments to scale up their support for initiatives that empower consumers with the information and tools they need to lead more sustainable lifestyles. We also call on governments to recognise and support the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to their lands, territories and resources to prevent some of the worst social and ecological impacts of large-scale unsustainable production systems and to encourage customary sustainable use of natural resources.
- A wide range of instruments are necessary to achieve the transition towards sustainable consumption and production. These include market, financial and regulatory instruments; behavioural change inspired through education, awareness and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles; a focus on well-being instead of GDP growth; redistribution of wealth; and the equitable sharing of environmental space. For that we need a new narrative encompassing human well-being, environmental protection, animal welfare and regenerative economic development, which goes beyond the paradigm of infinite growth and the promise that innovation and technology will allow us to decouple our high levels of consumption from resource use and environmental degradation.
- Unsustainable production and consumption is not only the root cause of environmental degradation but also of the increasing environmental conflicts around the world. Local communities suffer disproportionately from resource depletion, pollution, and land-grabbing and dislocation. We see an increase in mining activities all around the globe, which is linked to the ever-expanding demand for raw materials. We also see other large scale projects for

agricultural, industrial and energy production leading to conflict, dispossession on indigenous peoples and local communities, and environmental degradation.

- We request that governments forge a transformative alliance with civil society and the private sector that will drive forward an innovative, productive, resource-efficient, low-carbon and pollution-free economy as a means to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2) Resource efficiency, chemicals and waste

Resource efficiency:

- We request that governments ensure that only products that can be safely and sustainably reused, repaired, recycled or composted, are produced and put on the market
- True cost accounting in every part of the production chain is a must
- We urge governments to implement extended producer responsibility policies that drive producers to redesign products and processes in order to prevent pollution, toxic substances, and be resource efficient. The “Polluter Pays Principle” is a strong principle, but the main goal is to prevent pollution, not let the rich pay for it. Policies should also ensure the safe reuse, recycling, or composting of products while retaining materials in the economy as long as possible, at their highest possible quality;
- We recognize that plastics are a lifeline for the fossil fuel industry and as such, are structurally linked to climate change, in addition to polluting marine and other ecosystems. On this basis, we call on governments to reduce virgin plastic production, consumption and waste.
- Industrially farmed animals are fed on human-edible cereals and soy which they convert very inefficiently into meat and milk. This is an inefficient use of resources and undermines food security by reducing the grain available for human consumption. Livestock are only efficient when they are converting materials we cannot consume - e.g. grass, crop residues and by products - into food we can eat.

Chemicals:

- Materials and additives currently used in plastic production include synthetic endocrine disruptors and persistent organic pollutants that threaten human, animal and ecosystem health. We call on governments to phase out the use of toxic materials and additives in plastics, in order to achieve safe, non-toxic circular material flows.
- Chemicals are used in industrial animal agriculture to treat and control disease, promote growth and product quality, and to control “pests”. The routine use of antibiotics in industrial animal agriculture to prevent the diseases that are inevitable when animals are kept in crowded, stressful conditions leads to people developing resistance to key antibiotics. Residues in food and the environment can have serious health impacts (especially as concerns pesticides, fertilizers, and antibiotics).
- The intensive use of chemicals in agriculture, particularly of fertilizers, is also a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Excess fertilizer is converted to nitrous oxide which is a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide.
- We urge governments to establish systems that link composting initiatives or facilities to farms and urban food producers so that the need for chemical fertilizers is reduced.

Waste:

- We call on governments to acknowledge and support the work of NGOs and communities implementing zero waste systems at the local level in partnership with local authorities, reducing waste generation, improving separate collection, recycling and composting or anaerobic digestion.
- We congratulate governments that are taking courageous steps to prevent waste including plastic waste, through policies such as bans or fees on unnecessary single-use plastic items. We strongly encourage all governments to take similar steps as soon as possible, and to seek expertise from NGOs implementing zero waste work on safe alternative materials and alternative distribution systems.
- Global dependence on plastic scrap trade implies severe environmental injustices as it burdens certain communities, especially in Southeast Asian countries, with low-grade hard-to-recover

mixed plastics. We call for strengthened international cooperation that can ensure transparency and accountability in plastic scrap trade.

- We call on governments to integrate waste pickers as municipal waste service providers in cities, offering them safe, toxic-free and just working conditions. Their waste collection, separation and recycling in the informal economy offers crucial support to overburdened municipal waste systems, and makes an important contribution to circular economy.
- We request the phase-out of waste incineration (even with energy recovery), as it wastes resources that could otherwise be reused, recycled or composted, it feeds unsustainable consumption through a lock-in effect, it generates toxic air pollution and ashes, and contributes to climate change.
- A third of global food production is lost or wasted annually, and food waste is a leading greenhouse gas emitter. The question of food waste must be effectively addressed by food policy strategy, regulation and enforcement, and education/awareness. There are best practices which could be mandated – for example, national food waste reduction plans; regulation to ensure that food businesses give away/donate edible surplus foods; effective government recycling schemes and penalties for excess waste disposal; composting or anaerobic digestion of food waste.
- The use of human-edible crops to feed farm animals should be regarded as a form of food loss as 3.5 billion extra people could be fed each year if the crops used to feed animals were instead used for direct human consumption.

3) Ecosystems and biodiversity management and protection (incl food systems)

Wildlife and ecosystems:

- Since 1970, 70% of our wildlife has been wiped out. The key drivers of biodiversity loss include habitat loss and degradation, climate change, pollution, and over-exploitation. These threats continue to grow, and biodiversity continues to be lost at an alarming rate, despite the current sustainable use paradigm that underlies many multilateral environmental agreements.
- Traditional societies had a sense of respect and reverence for wildlife, and only took what they needed. But increasingly wildlife is viewed as a “money maker”, and inessential and unsustainable uses abound. Unless steps are taken to stem this, and to recognise the need to protect nature and wildlife because of its intrinsic value, we will obliterate our wildlife and destroy the habitats which sustain it.
- Governments should recognise, promote and support indigenous and community based conservation and ecotourism that is based on conservation of terrestrial and marine habitats,.
- We call upon governments to ban and combat illegal trade of wild fauna and flora. Increasingly, exotic birds and reptiles are sold in all sort of markets in many countries, where consumers are tempted to acquire them as pets, without being aware of the suffering and impact on the species and their habitats by encouraging that trade.

Food systems and food sovereignty:

- Since intensive livestock systems are at the heart of -or contribute to - many problems affecting health, food security, the environment and animal welfare, it is vital that we build sustainable food systems. We need to promote production systems using closed cycles (circularity, agroecology, organic agriculture, integrated crop-livestock systems), and which treat animals ethically. The polluter pays principle shall be used for agricultural inputs and to restore damaged ecosystems. Hazardous pesticides, excessive use of fertilizers and routine use of antibiotics should be banned and current subsidies for resource-depleting and environmentally damaging practices and products should be terminated.
- Our food systems should be made resource-efficient, thereby encouraging the reduction of meat and dairy consumption, encouraging the consumption of sustainably produced plant-based foods, using organic fertilisers (e.g. manure, other by-products) and legumes which can fix atmospheric nitrogen in soils, using biobased products such as biopesticides, and crop rotation to promote nitrogen and carbon cycles and restoring degraded soils. We call on countries to promote and support small-scale production, thereby improving the livelihoods of the rural population, food security and even economic development as opposed to industrial farming. Environmentally damaging trade practices (such as livestock fed by imported soy or palm causing deforestation, pollution of water, products containing unsustainably sourced palm oil)

should be eliminated, as well as subsidies for environmentally damaging production methods (like fertilizers).

- We call on countries to halt the expansion of cattle pastures and cropland (mainly used to produce animal feed crops) into forests and other important ecosystems as this leads to massive loss of wildlife habitats and biodiversity and the release of stored carbon into the atmosphere.
- Companies should minimize the amount of packaging used for the production of food and provide a clear and honest labelling system with information about environmental footprint and method of production. In order to move to a sustainable agricultural model, patents on living organisms such as seeds should be avoided, and instead there should be a promotion of seed exchange among farmers and the revitalisation of traditional seeds by indigenous peoples and local communities.
- We call on countries to establish independent training and extension services for farmers and processors on sustainable production methods.
- To ensure safe reuse of wastewater, agricultural pollution of water sources has to be halted at source, by fully closed cycles and transition to agro-ecological practices that exclude synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.
- We call governments to promote small scale food producers and traditional sustainable agricultural practices of indigenous peoples and local communities, and give all necessary supports to them, so that this essential source of food security is not lost.
-

Halting deforestation and forest degradation

- Deforestation and forest degradation are, in particular in the tropics, a main driver of climate change. Urgent action is needed to halt both. Where deforestation is mainly driven by agriculture expansion and illegal logging, forest degradation is mainly caused by unsustainable harvesting practices. Sustainable Forest Management should be promoted in different ways, including through legislation and strong enforcement, while buffering and protecting intact primary forests. Forest certification needs to be promoted also through the shifting of tax burdens so that a level playing field also in economic terms is created for such practices as opposed to those ignoring the social and environmental functions forests have and should maintain. The certification of agricultural commodities, such as palm oil, soy and sugar need to be effectively assessed and monitored, to ensure that companies fully comply with the certification principles and criteria. Voluntary certification standards need to be complemented by legal regulatory processes to ensure that sustainable consumption and production are achieved.

The Marine Arctic Peace Sanctuary (MAPS)

- We call upon governments to become signatories to the Marine Arctic Peace Sanctuary (MAPS) Treaty on an urgent basis to allow the effective entry into force by December 2019 of this vital protection for the Arctic Ocean, its ecosystems, and all life on Earth.
- The Marine Arctic Peace Sanctuary (MAPS) Treaty is an immediate and decisive response to the global crisis of the melting Arctic sea ice. The most direct and effective method of cooling the overheated earth is to protect its own cooling system - the Arctic ice cap. The MAPS Treaty establishes the Arctic Ocean north of the Arctic Circle as an international marine protected area free from commercialization and militarization, safeguarding sea ice from pollution and ice break-up and maintaining peace.

4) Environmental governance

- We consider that there should be more strategic and proactive environmental governance; with greater attention paid to the root causes of environmental degradation, and the development of effective preventive approaches. We should reform our institutions and governance systems to recognise and respect the biophysical reality of Earth Systems, using the planetary boundaries framework to ensure that we return to and remain within those boundaries.
- We urge governments of the world, especially those supporting wars, financing war machines, benefiting from wars, to acknowledge the impact of wars and armed conflicts and creating

refugees on human rights, health, environmental rights of victims of wars and armed conflicts, the environment and natural resources. More specifically, we call UN Environment and governments to respond to the increasing pressure and impacts the current crisis of several countries in the world, like Syria, Iraq, Palestina, Venezuela, causing millions of refugees. The displaced population is significantly affected by and affecting the fragile environmental situation in the regions they are displaced to.

- We urge governments to realize that NGOs and public should be informed about forthcoming projects with possible impacts on the environment. Consultation meetings and workshops, public hearing and stakeholders roundtable discussions should be part of the decision making process from beginning to end.
- We call on governments to help boost accountability efforts by governments and civil society organizations to hold culprits of environmental infringement, including but not limited to the private sector, legally and financially liable.
- We call on UN Environment to support and facilitate the engagement between concerned NGOs and governments on monitoring and recording of environmental damage, especially in the projects conducted by UN Environment.
- We strongly request governments to work on building the capacity of the environmental judicial system across their countries. Environmental NGOs could be great partners, in review of existing legislations, and suggesting stronger ones that can fill gaps, strengthen loose ends, and put workable processes. This would require an open-source database that is easily accessible to the public, easy and fast access to law, and rule of law.

Concerning the Global Pact for the Environment:

- We support the development of a Global Pact for the Environment, as a binding international legal instrument to unify and structure the rules and principles of environmental law for the long term. The Secretary-General's report on gaps in the international environmental law highlighted the piecemeal and reactive character of the existing sectoral regulatory framework, with gaps in both coverage and implementation. However, it did not pointed out that the main gap lies on the lack of consideration of the Earth System as an object of law.
- The Global Pact represent a unique opportunity to establish the framework necessary to maintain the state of the Earth System within a safe operating space for life which entails operating within the planetary boundaries.
- We asks that the Global Pact for the Environment recognizes the Earth System as intangible natural heritage of mankind and introduces a definition of the Earth System.
- A Global Pact has the potential to achieve coherence across sectors, and more effective implementation at national and international levels for this reason the Global Pact for the Environment must introduce the need to include in all MEAs compliance mechanisms allowing members of the public to file submissions of cases of non-compliance by the Parties following the Aarhus Convention model. .

Right to information and to meaningfully participate in environmental decisions (Principle 10)

- We call on governments to uphold the right of people and communities to information on pollutants and to meaningfully participate in environmental decisions, in line with the Aarhus and Escazu Conventions. Access to information on the environmental and social impact of products will allow communities to fully play their role in climate change mitigation, and in safeguarding human and ecosystem wellbeing. Specifically, we request the disclosure of product information to consumers and communities, including the nature of materials and chemical additives, the ratio of recycled content, the carbon footprint (including biogenic carbon) miles, the water and energy footprints, and the fairness of labour practices.

Concerning shrinking space for civil society:

- We call on governments to realize the potential of partnership with NGOs rather than trying to silence them, ignore, or discredit them.
- NGOs are civil society's movement and voice; governments should stop attempting to form "Governmental organised -NGOs (GONGOs) to represent the government's view, and compete with the true NGOs and community based organisations. Instead, governments should attempt to open a dialogue with existing active NGOs with justified constituencies and networks

with grassroots organisations. They should listen to their views, and utilise them as citizens critics of the government's and the private sector's performance towards sustainability.

- Environmental media is an important tool for public awareness, and for making NGOs' and researchers' voice heard. Governments should support freedom of speech, and encourage official media to be open and inviting for those views.

Concerning marine plastic pollution:

- We recognize the severity and urgency of the plastic pollution crisis, including in our oceans. We also recognize the insufficient reach and effectiveness of current environmental governance instruments on the marine plastic pollution crisis, and the need for a new and binding global instrument focused on prevention, as was clear from the assessment of the UNEA-mandated Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on marine litter and microplastics, and from NGO expert interventions in this forum. We call governments to take decisive action on this issue by supporting relevant resolutions at UNEA4.

Concerning geoengineering:

- Some bigger groups among international civil society, are extremely worried about the resolution on geoengineering submitted by Switzerland in Cluster 4.
- Climate geoengineering refers to large-scale technological schemes for intervention in the Earth's oceans, soils and atmosphere with the aim of reducing the effects of climate change, usually temporarily. All of them come with large-scale social and ecological risks, in particular for those already disproportionately affected by climate change and other ecological crises.
- Geoengineering technologies are being researched and developed primarily in high-emission countries in the Global North, with fossil fuel companies being at the forefront due to their interest in technologies that create the illusion of a technological „fix“ for the climate problem that would allow business-as-usual to continue.
- The debate on geoengineering is highly biased toward certain types of knowledge and expertise. Pro-geoengineering researchers are usually considered the only credible source of knowledge, while the risks and concerns of civil society and social movements, Indigenous Peoples, farmers, womens and other rights holders are frequently discarded as second-order problems. We are concerned that the resolution submitted by Switzerland that aims to establish an Expert Group would repeat that fallacy and thereby serve to create further legitimacy for high-risk large-scale technological schemes to manipulate the environment.
- At the very least, the Expert Group established for conducting an assessment on geoengineering for UNEA must be open-ended to ensure full participation and engagement of all relevant stakeholders. A robust review mechanism for Expert Reviewers, including civil society, and Governments must be put in place (see, for instance, Review Mechanism for reports at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).
- The 2010 de facto moratorium on all climate-related geoengineering agreed upon unanimously by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the regulatory approaches to marine geoengineering put in place under the London Protocol of the London Convention, prohibiting ocean fertilization, must be honoured and serve as the only legitimate starting point for further deliberations on the governance of geoengineering.

Public-Private-Partnerships:

- UN aim is to protect people and the planet and should put strong focus on sustainable social-ecological initiatives (e.g. small and medium enterprises, start-ups and NGO initiatives) that provide, for example alternatives to single-used products, and their networks, including civil society organisations.
- There is little transparency on UNEP's partnerships with the private sector. The list of partnership agreements is not easily accessible to the governments or civil society. Rumours are heard that UNEP has spent lots of money on paying a global car company (Volvo oceans race) and has a partnership with Coca Cola - one of the biggest contributors to plastic-bottle pollution worldwide. Neither Volvo nor Coca Cola are an example of positive sustainable development action. Corporations are aimed at maximizing profit for their shareholders. Let us recall that the United Nations aim is to work for people and planet. Let's keep that focus clear.
- Large corporations have been evading taxes and not paying for the environmental harm caused by their production. Instead of providing such corporations with the benefit of positive marketing

by 'partnering' with UNEP, there should be a policy to hold corporations accountable for damage done and stop tax evasion.

- The contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities towards the achievement of global commitments on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development need to be fully recognised and supported. Their roles in environmental governance should be given more space through enhanced participation and support.

Therefore, UNEP should only engage in honest partnerships that first and foremost:

- Demonstrate where a proposed or existing partnership adds value and is not incoherent as measured against the 2030 Agenda; and show that the UN values espoused by the partnership are communicated and internalized.
- Promote a holistic approach to SDG implementation, and safeguard against collaboration that advances a particular goal at the expense of another - for example, partnerships that reduce CO2 emissions, but increase toxic emissions, should not be eligible.
- Focus on the innovative, truly environmentally sustainable, socially responsible start-ups including initiatives by NGOs and local groups - they need the partnership with UNEP to be of benefit to people and planet.

We recommend that UNEP partnerships should be based on principles including

- Ambitious, transformative and clear goals
- Transparency and full disclosure of investor relations
- Truly environmentally & socially sustainable
- Fair power relations between partners
- Resource sharing

5) UNEP Programme of Work (PoW)

The future of the UN Environment Assembly:

- The delivery of this agenda will require greater emphasis on the role of civil society organisations. It is not just states, international organisations or the private sector that will implement the outcomes. More than ever we need UNEA's outputs to be tailored towards those implementing them at the national and local level: civil society, including local authorities, grassroots organisations and individuals. These are the people who can build and sustain the societal change that people and planet require, yet UNEA does not do enough to translate and communicate its resolutions and decisions to a broader audience. Those local groups also require support to build its capacity to deliver change. Enhancing public participation at all levels will also provide more grassroots solutions for environmental challenges.
- An agenda-setting Assembly must also ensure that its agenda is fully implemented. UNEA's resolutions should not just be the responsibility of UN Environment to implement, they are mainly the responsibility of its Member States. Commonly we see engagement during negotiations, then little in the way of follow up. Resolutions are left to UN Environment to implement, and few carry with them specific budgets for their delivery. It is critical that ownership is shared and that states demonstrate leadership, particularly where public and private stakeholders are also expected to play their part. We would prefer quality, not quantity, and for commitments to be properly funded and effectively delivered - an objective that is vital for UNEA's credibility. Where appropriate, this should include funds dedicated to building the capacity for their national and local implementation.
- We need urgently a monitoring framework for the resolutions adopted by UNEA and UNEA should also address methods to monitor the legal implementation of existing multilateral environmental agreements.
- The increasing focus on business at UNEA and the change from the Science Policy Forum to be a Science Policy Business Forum should be reversed to ensure that the forum prioritises public, rather than private interests. UN Environment is uniquely positioned to promote the science-policy interface and the Forum is one of the mechanisms through which UN Environment can be a driving force in ensuring that the science-policy interface is strengthened globally for public interest.

- Private sector plays a role and therefore we need clear actions for business to come out of the resolutions and a way of tracking these.
- We would like to see a better integration of the PoW into the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development. The SDGs cannot be delivered without seamless integration of environment across all goals and UNEP's role in supporting this.