



African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development (ANYL4PSD) INPUTS:

Call for Inputs to specified questions on the ministerial declaration of UNEA-5 (Deadline: 12 May 2020)

- **What would you, as government/organization/stakeholder, welcome as the most important elements and /or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?**

Key messages that my organization would welcome as the most important from the Ministers in the declaration to address the theme more impactful manner are:

- ✓ Viruses, bacteria and other microorganisms have played a vital role in life on Earth for 3.8 billion years. The vast majorities are absolutely harmless, and are often essential for ecosystems and human health – just think of the human microbiome or the innumerable symbioses between microbes and other organisms.
- ✓ A few microorganisms, such as pathogenic bacteria and viruses or parasitic protozoa, can have significant negative effects on human health.
- ✓ Pathogens can transform quickly, which allows them to pass from wild animals to humans. These emerging diseases endanger human lives and have major socioeconomic impacts.
- ✓ The chances of pathogens like viruses passing from wild and domestic animals to humans may be increased by the destruction and modification of natural ecosystems, the illegal or uncontrolled trade of wild species and the unhygienic conditions under which wild and domestic species are mixed and marketed.
- ✓ Human behavior and demographic factors significantly increase these risks, and the speed with which humans travel between continents can cause the runaway spread of pandemics.
- ✓ Conserving and maintaining nature and the benefits it provides is essential for preserving our health and well-being
- ✓ The unregulated trade in wild animals and direct contact with animal parts exposes humans to contact with viruses and other pathogens hosted by those species.
- ✓ As bushmeat consumption and trade grow, hunting, transportation, handling and cooking practices that do not follow food safety standards pose risks to human health, including through the transmission of pathogens.
- ✓ Wild animals of all kinds are trafficked along commercial routes that connect continents and distant countries, potentially amplifying the spread of pathogens.

www.anyl4psd.org; info@anyl4psd.org

Tel: +237 6 95962496/+227 92 45 41 85

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- ✓ Wild animals, or those that are captured and bred in captivity for consumption of meat or other parts, have enormous potential to transmit viruses, particularly when packed close together.
 - ✓ China’s recent ban on eating wild animals and crackdown on illegal and unregulated wildlife trade is timely. But much more should be done to effectively tackle this problem at the global scale.
 - ✓ We need a better understanding of how our ecosystems function, and in particular their role in defending us from the spread of diseases. In the meantime, protecting and restoring natural ecosystems is crucial for avoiding unknown risks to our health; the risk of zoonotic diseases should be a key consideration in land-use planning.
 - ✓ Land-use change, including deforestation and the modification of natural habitats, are held responsible for nearly half of emerging zoonoses.
 - ✓ The destruction and degradation of forests exposes humans to new forms of contact with microbes and the wild species that host them.
- **How can the Environment Assembly make a significant contribution to *Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* at a global scale? In doing so, you may take into account the preparation for the meeting, its conduct and follow-up, as well as its relationship to other meetings and processes.**

As a global Assembly/community, it is crucial that we take steps to reduce the risk of future pandemics. **Some of the most important actions we can take are to crack down on illegal wildlife trade and close unregulated wildlife markets; and to preserve intact ecosystems and restore the health of those that have been degraded.** As we tackle the alarming impacts of the coronavirus crisis, we also need to keep in mind the ongoing nature and climate crises that threaten our future. It is now more imperative than ever for governments to sign on to a New Deal for Nature and People, a globally binding agreement to:

- Halve our footprint on nature
- Stop the loss of natural habitats
- Stop the extinction of living species.

Along with maintaining our natural systems, action is needed to restore those that have been destroyed or degraded, in a way that benefits people and restores the fundamental functions that biomes such as forests provide. Aware of this challenge, the UN has dedicated the 2020s as the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Conserving and restoring our ecosystems and the services they provide – including disease regulation – should be seen as a fundamental part of maintaining human and planetary health. As we survey the devastation wreaked by the coronavirus, we must take this time to reflect, and to harness the power of nature to prevent future health crises.

The Environment Assembly should focus on One Health.

Over the last decade, the “One Health” approach has been promoted at a global level. This strategic concept recognizes how human health is closely linked to other animal and environmental health. It has been formally recognized by many UN bodies, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE),

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the European Commission, research institutes, NGOs and others. By looking holistically at the health of people, other animals, plants, living and working environments and ecosystems, One Health promotes a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to addressing the potential or active risks arising from the interface of human, animal and environmental health.

To make the One Health approach truly effective, stronger, systematic interaction is needed between the relevant professional groups, in particular between doctors and veterinarians, epidemiologists, ecologists and wildlife experts, but also sociologists, economists and legal practitioners.

Only by recognizing that our health and well-being are closely linked to that of the natural world can we protect our species from the most harmful effects of pandemics.