

Initial ideas and inputs to specified questions on the ministerial declaration of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly

- 1) What would you, as a 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?

The theme of the ministerial declaration *Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* reflects the need to overcome the challenges that environmental degradation poses as an existential threat to the world. In the current situation of Covid-19 pandemic and the post-Covid recovery, it is necessary to strengthen even more our endeavors towards a sustainable and smart growth in line with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its goals. Now it is the right moment to maximize our efforts in transforming the world into a resource-efficient and competitive economy where economic growth is decoupled from resource use, „by turning environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making the transition just and inclusive for all.“ (EU Green Deal)

As it has been stated in numerous documents, environmental dimensions play a critical role in both understanding the origins of the COVID-19 crisis and successfully rebuilding a post-pandemic world, addressing the inadequacy of the global response to environmental degradation challenges.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals represent our best existing global road map for the future. As mentioned in the Secretary General’s report on the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19: „We must seize the opportunity of this crisis to strengthen our commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. By making progress on our global roadmap for a more inclusive and sustainable future, we can better respond to future crises“.

Through the work of UNEA there is a unique opportunity to strengthen the voice of the environment and the environmental pillar of sustainable development, and to offer widely acceptable flexible and effective actions and solutions. UN Environment must continue to have a prominent and irreplaceable role in changing our habits and choices in the management of natural, human and social sources, as well as in producing goods and services. At the same time, our actions must ensure that economic performances are not reduced, but on the contrary, that resource efficiency and productivity, innovations, job creation, environmentally sound technologies, and sustainable consumption and production are fostered. This should be achieved primarily by decreasing anthropogenic pressures on natural resources, whilst providing an interface between a healthy environment and healthy people. In addition, the science policy interface should be promoted by using science to catalyze action at a global scale (science-policy interface).

Being aware of the complexity of the mandate, we have to pay a particular attention to empowering UN environment to deliver all over the world, and in particular to those regions and people where assistance is most needed. Preserving the environment on one hand, and proactive attitude at all levels – global, regional and national, would in turn ensure UNEP and UNEA to keep prominent and irreplaceable role in implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda, as well as to successfully build the partnerships within the UN system and the UN system and relevant international stakeholders.

At present we are facing growing environmental challenges, and therefore we cannot leave anyone behind. Proactive approach with efficient and effective responses is necessary everywhere, all the time, by all of us.

Our aim to restore and sustain a healthy environment, primarily by decreasing anthropogenic pressures on natural resources and providing an interface between a healthy environment and healthy people, may be achieved only through concerted efforts and common responsibility.

To that end, Montenegro expects the UNEA 5 Declaration will bring us closer to healthier and innovative solution for a better future for our nature and our planet. It is important to mention that UNEA-5 will be the occasion to agree upon and approve UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2022-2025. Therefore the forthcoming UN Environment Assembly will provide an opportunity to identify and agree on transformative actions for Nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

- 2) 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.

The 5th Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) will have the opportunity to position investments in nature and green jobs, sustainable finance, sound chemicals management, and sustainable production and consumption for the purpose of preparing Covid-19 recovery plans, identifying and capturing transformative actions and policies for nature.

By adopting the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders committed to build a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice and equality without any form of discrimination. A sustainable society is a tolerant society, in which every individual is enabled to live up to his/her potential and therefore to increase the potential of the society itself. In Montenegro's view, this is a society in which: the promotion of continual, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the improvement of the state of human resources, the strengthening of social inclusion and support for values, norms and behavior patterns are pursued as being significant for the sustainability of the society, for equal and productive employment and a decent job for everyone.

Our actions must ensure that economic performances are not diminished, but on the contrary, that resource efficiency and productivity, innovations, job creation, environmentally sound technologies, and sustainable consumption and production are fostered.

Ministerial Declaration may significantly contribute towards addressing the following priority needs widely evident in the different global and regional contexts:

- Overcoming environmental and health challenges through fostering sustainable and efficient resource management;
- Application of an integrated life-cycle approach to achieve resource efficiency in key economic sectors, as well as a low-carbon economy, along with a significantly increased reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to the baseline year;
- Halt the degradation of renewable natural resources, biodiversity, water, air and soil, whilst enabling efficient natural resource management, as well as resource-efficient use of metallic and non-metallic resources;

- Promotion of innovation in chemical management to protect human health and the environment from the harmful effects of chemicals and waste;
- Development of policies for sound waste management, including a commitment to ambitious national targets by 2025 for reducing waste generation and phasing out single-use plastic products;
- Innovative actions to support circular economy modalities for the prevention, reduction and recycling of waste, as well as the reusing of products;
- Improvement of environmental monitoring systems and technologies;
- Investing in environmental research, education and awareness raising in the framework of sustainable development.

The adequate responses to the previously mentioned priority needs may have significant positive impacts on national economies, which are still characterized by an inefficient use of resources, especially of energy and water, while only an insignificant portion of generated waste is being recycled or reused.

Building upon the document Note on the preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly prepared 150th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme, we would like to support the way forward proposed in that document, especially regarding the importance of UNEA-5 in “providing an opportunity to leverage other strategic ‘nature focused’ objectives, commitments and action plans that underpin the implementation of the UN Decade of Action to deliver the Global Goals, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the post-2020 Framework on Biodiversity, the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.”

Also, in addition, “UNEA-5 as the primary global platform for the world’s Environment Ministers, together with other sectors in their government and societies, including local communities and business leaders, can help identify and capture transformative actions and policies for nature. The Environment Assembly can mobilize leadership and generate new broad political commitments to nature, underpinned by measurable and timebound targets captured in its political ministerial declaration, resolutions and partnerships designed to reverse the negative trends on biodiversity loss.”

Finally, it would be important to keep in mind the UNEA-4 Resolution on Implementation and follow up of UNEA resolutions and related activities which establishes a foundation for continuous monitoring of the progress in the implementation of all Assembly resolutions involving establishment of a monitoring mechanism by which Member States can track and assess the status of the implementation of previous and future resolutions and declarations. This is relevant as many innovative and sustainable actions have been already proposed and agreed, but their implementation, their impact on the ground has not been satisfactory. Therefore, in defining new visions, activities and actions, we should not forget the ones aligned with all sustainable policies still to be implemented.