

H.E. Mr Sveinung Rotevatn
President of the UN Environment Assembly
Minister of Climate and Environment, Norway

12th May 2020

Excellency,

Subject: Input to the outline Ministerial Declaration for the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA5), on the topic of “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”

As an accredited organisation within the NGO Major Group of UNEP, BirdLife International would like to offer the following brief inputs to the development of the ministerial declaration for the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly, following your two questions.

- 1. What are the most important elements and/or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?**

Making 2020 transformational for nature, through green recovery packages

The COVID19 pandemic has brought economic and social turmoil and tragedy, including the need to rethink both strategy and timing of what was planned to be the ‘super year’ for nature, and bringing a major new dimension to risk and responsibility regarding nature. The result is that 2020 will certainly be transformational – and world leaders must ensure this is transformational for nature, with recovery packages (focusing on both finance and policy change) addressing health aspects together with previous imperatives on combatting climate change and biodiversity loss.

Focusing the SDGs on both human rights and human actions for nature

The UN, 75 years on from its inception in a world transformed and impacted by environmental degradation, must rise to the challenge and put environmental sustainability at the top of its agenda for the next 75 years. The SDGs must support both human actions and human rights to focus on ensuring a healthy environment for current and future generations. This should be the defining moment for the UN, in ensuring its relevance and role for the next 75 years.

Recognising the universal human right to a healthy environment

The historic **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, in the wake of the devastation and turmoil of the Second World War. Widely recognised and respected as helping to guard against atrocities and injustice the world over, it has not been reopened since, but has one increasingly apparent failing: the lack of an environmental dimension. However, since then human development has become increasingly unsustainable, with consequent negative impacts on people, in particular the poorest and most vulnerable. Following a series of debates, reports and resolutions during the last decade, international consensus has grown around the need for the UN to establish the universal human right to a healthy environment.

The key role of UNEP and proposed UN Resolutions on human rights and the environment in 2020

The issue has been given added momentum by the appointment and work of a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in 2012, and in 2018 UNEP established the UN's **Environmental Rights Initiative**, calling on governments and businesses to promote, protect and respect environmental rights. The proposed **Global Pact for the Environment** would provide a new overarching international legal framework for environmental protection, and could act as the first dedicated environmental human rights instrument. This issue should be high on the agenda of the **UN General Assembly** and the **UN Summit on Biodiversity** in September, with UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly **Resolutions** proposed for this year, which should also call for the addition of a new article enshrining this right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see www.birdlife.org/healthyplanet for our call to the UN Secretary General). Representing the highest expression of human aspirations, beyond the legal aspects, including this right to a healthy environment is exactly the signal of hope and commitment to a better future that the world needs.

Nature-based solutions and joined-up policy on nature and climate

Climate change and biodiversity loss (the cause of increased risk of zoonotic disease outbreak) are the most important – and interdependent – human-induced environmental challenges that society faces today, threatening people's lives and wellbeing, with the poorest and most vulnerable hit first and hardest. The latest intergovernmental science-to-policy reports show that global temperature rise beyond 1.5°C would be devastating for people and biodiversity everywhere, with the loss of small island states and essentially all the world's coral reefs. They also show that nature is part of the solution. Urgent, joined-up policy and action to tackle both the climate and biodiversity crises is therefore key – driving the rapid, just transition to nature-sensitive renewable energy such as wind and solar, while promoting and developing nature-based solutions that support biodiversity while providing climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Guiding the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and nature-based NDCs and SDGs

Both the nature-sensitive renewable energy transition and biodiversity-inclusive nature-based solutions are key transformative pathways and provide obvious examples of interlinkages, cross-sector collaboration and multi-stakeholder approaches needed for this extended super year for nature, climate and sustainable development, as governments develop the post-2020 global

biodiversity framework and review their climate Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the biodiversity-related SDGs. They link in particular to SDGs 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17. While neither renewable energy nor NbS are a substitute for an urgent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, appropriately planned and implemented (e.g. following guidelines and key principles as laid out for NbS at <https://nbsguidelines.info/>), they are both absolutely critical if we are to meet global goals and targets on nature, climate and sustainable development by 2030.

International cooperation and synergies between international conventions and policy processes

To facilitate this, improved international cooperation is needed to ensure synergies between the biodiversity-related conventions, the Rio Conventions and the SDGs, to facilitate and improve the quality of reporting and tracking of progress. This should be coordinated at ecologically relevant scale (e.g. along rivers, coasts or flyways). This needs greater political will, a higher profile and value given to nature, and improved tools and guidance on policies, planning and implementation of action which impacts nature, either positively or negatively, which in turn needs resources and capacity building for data collection, management and technical support.

Reorientation of finance, investment and funding

Fundamentally, action on nature and climate change needs a reorientation of investment (e.g. from perverse subsidies to fossil fuels and other damaging industries to renewables, supporting SDG 12C), inclusion of environmental externalities in economic systems, reconsideration of GDP-based growth model (SDG 8.1 and 8.2) and the concept of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation (8.4), and the introduction of policies, regulations and incentives to promote nature-based or nature-sensitive investment and technology transfer (e.g. a requirement to develop and use tools and guidance such as sensitivity mapping and the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) as part of the finance package, pre-empting development approval).

Supporting local action and avoiding the costs of inaction

But more broadly, funding needs to be more strategic, more sustainable, planning and committing to action on a much longer-term basis and at a more holistic, wider scale. Currently, resources are more easily mobilised for short-term tool development or project-level interventions than supporting the underlying data or systems that are needed for appropriate, cross-cutting risk assessment and decision-making at the temporal and spatial scale that is needed. Resources and funding also need to be more inclusive and accessible to civil society, which ultimately collects and manages much of the data needed for government and industry decision-making but often on a voluntary or project-to-project, hand-to-mouth basis. Such work is often perceived to be extensive, costly and complicated, but with nature and climate impacts increasingly costing governments, insurers and communities around the world, we are already seeing the costs of inaction due to lack of awareness, or poor decision-making due to inadequate information.

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,*

regarding the preparation for the meeting, its conduct and follow-up, and its relationship to other meetings and processes?

The meeting should include government delegates and experts involved in related key meetings, to ensure key thinking and outcomes are built on from each meeting to the next. Such meetings include the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the **CBD**, the high seas negotiations happening under **UNCLOS**, the integration of nature-based solutions into NDCs to combat climate change under **UNFCCC**, the recognition of the human right to a healthy environment under the **UN Human Rights Council** and **UN General Assembly** Resolutions in 2020, and the strengthening of targets, indicators and implementation of the SDGs under the **High Level Political Forum** on sustainable development, **UN Summit on Biodiversity** and UN General Assembly. In particular, experts from the health, disease, modelling, economic, human rights and sustainable development fields should input to the meeting, and efforts should be made to develop **interdisciplinary thinking** and reflect on the gaps and needs in terms of **international environmental law architecture** and **implementation** mechanisms/issues.

In particular, UNEA5 is now likely to be very well-timed to feed into the final stages of negotiations on the **post-2020 framework**, critical for ensuring we start to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

The **IUCN World Conservation Congress**, now scheduled for the month before in January 2021, provides a key opportunity for multi-stakeholder input which can be fed in to UNEA5. For example, we are involved in leading a set of sessions in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework pavilion which will look at political opportunities and challenges, integration of the biodiversity-related conventions into the post-2020 framework, synergies between the post-2020 framework and the SDGs, nature-based solutions and the role of the UN Summit on Biodiversity in enhancing synergies.

Finally, in addition to the human rights aspects, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the gaps in international policy mechanisms to address the risk of zoonotic outbreaks and the role of deforestation and land use change and wildlife use and trade, as well as those for human rights and the environment highlighted above. UNEA5 is therefore well-timed to take stock and look at options for addressing these gaps, including through the **Global Pact for the Environment**.

Thank you for considering these inputs and we look forward to a productive and successful Environment Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Noëlle Kümpel
Head of Policy (noelle.kumpel@birdlife.org)