



Regions4 Input to the 5th Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) Ministerial Declaration

Introduction

Regions4 Sustainable Development (Regions4) as an accredited organisation with the UN Environment Programme welcomes the consultative dialogue for the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) Ministerial Declaration and thanks the President of UNEA-5 and the members of the Bureau for the opportunity to share our inputs.

We further wish to express our support to the efforts to lead an inclusive process where all relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute and share their views on the scopes and actions for an ambitious declaration to the UNEA-5, particularly in the midst of the current global situation where our efforts to address climate change, biodiversity loss and the sustainable development goals must remain in the forefront.

Regions4 believes that it is now more imperative than ever to strengthen collective action to stop biodiversity loss and protect our ecosystems. We are currently witnessing the effects of deforestation and ecosystem degradation and its direct impact on the spread of zoonotic diseases at a global scale. A transformative change is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including a fundamental and system-wide reorganization that must include putting the value of nature at the core of UN agendas, not only to avoid future global pandemics, but to ensure a green recovery.

The determination to urgently and ambitiously scale up the international community's efforts to overcome common environmental challenges in a balanced and integrated manner demands the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including all levels of governments. In this sense, subnational governments have a vital role as the nexus between the national and local levels of government, thus ensuring vertical integration and coherence. They address their populations' needs to the national level and on the other hand, materialise international and national strategies and policies in their territories. In this regard, they work to avoid crucial policy gaps between local actions plans and national policy frameworks.

In this sense, as a global network of subnational governments for sustainable development, we wish to provide the following additional inputs to the ongoing consultation:

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?

Regions4 urges the acknowledgement of subnational governments **to highlight a multi-level governance approach that stresses the importance of collaborative action to achieve a more sustainable environment**. As stated in our inputs to the UNEA-5 theme, subnational governments directly experience current environmental challenges connected to *inter alia* climate change, biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, land degradation and can therefore provide quicker, innovative responses and are often directly responsible for the decision-making and policy implementation to address said challenges.



Subnational governments have accumulated knowledge and lessons learned on the potential of nature-based solutions that involve conservation, sustainable management and ecosystems restoration, not only to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, but also the targets of the Paris Agreement and to reach the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in their territories. Implementors, such as subnational governments, have proven to be essential allies in the fulfilment of the global aspirations for nature. Therefore, we believe that a stronger collaboration between all levels of government is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, halting biodiversity loss and tackling climate change.

How can the Environment Assembly make a significant contribution to Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a global scale?

Regions4 would like to stress the need to include climate change as a cross-cutting issue that is in urgent need of acceleration. The UNEA-5 theme offers an enormous opportunity to further enhance and **give visibility to the interconnections between biodiversity loss and climate change, specifically through “Proposed action area 3: Nature for Climate”**. Moreover, in line with UNFCCC’s call for enhanced action on climate change adaptation, highlighting that it must be addressed with the same priority as mitigation, we believe the Environment Assembly can make a significant contribution to **enhance the importance of adaptation efforts through nature** specifically through nature-based solutions (for example, water resources and management; forestry, protected areas, and biodiversity; agriculture and zootechnics) as they support ecosystem resilience, particularly by preventing soil erosion and greenhouse gas emissions, while also helping to reduce the impacts of climate change, resulting in combined benefits at an environmental, societal, and economic level.

Equally, we believe that in order to significantly contribute **to strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the Environment Assembly needs to consistently integrate UN Conventions**. The profound changes needed to transform the mechanisms that drive development should integrate biodiversity considerations into development, climate change and the economic sectors; **mainstreaming biodiversity is therefore another key solution to address environmental challenges**. The UNEA-5 as well as the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework process, that will culminate at COP-15, are a unique opportunity to reflect the inclusion of the value of nature across all agendas and secure the inclusion of all levels of government, private sector, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that Regions4 and its member subnational governments are eager to offer their expertise and collaboration to the UN Environment in order to strengthen the role of subnational governments as key partners to find solutions and implement actions related to the global environmental agenda.

About Regions4

Regions4 is a global network that solely represents subnational governments (states, regions, and provinces) in UN processes, European Union initiatives and global discussions in the fields of climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents 42 members from 20 countries in 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation, and capacity building, Regions4 empowers subnational governments to accelerate global action. Regions4 is an accredited organisation with the UN Environment Programme and Local Authorities Major Group representative. For more information, please visit: www.regions4.org