

Rwanda Inputs to the Ministerial Declaration for the 5th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Nairobi, Kenya on 22–26 February 2021

The Government of Rwanda wishes to thank the President of UNEA, Honorable Sveinung Rotevatn, for the opportunity to offer initial inputs and ideas to structure the UNEA 5th Ministerial Declaration.

As highlighted by the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” nature is the foundation for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, as the world’s population grows the needs also continue to grow, we overexploit the natural resources which leads to the major environmental problems that we are facing today including climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution in all its forms.

The Government of Rwanda supports UNEA’s efforts to strengthen leadership, catalyze intergovernmental action on the environment, and to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Government of Rwanda wishes to reiterate its strong commitment to contribute to the achievement of SDGs and to addressing the current World major challenges including Climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution.

Setting the Scene

UNEA-5 comes at an important moment. The global community will be in the midst of—or just recovering from—a global pandemic while, at the same time, over a third of the way into the ambitious 15-year plan for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. What the pandemic has taught us, however, is that collectively the global community can unite to make sacrifices for the greater good and take unprecedented action in the face of uncertainty. This newfound collectivism should feature prominently at UNEA-5 and set the scene for the Ministerial Declaration.

Elements and Key Messages

The Government of Rwanda would welcome a Ministerial Declaration at UNEA-5 that specifically includes the following elements and key messages:

- **Climate Change.** Climate change will require a pandemic-like response from the global community to achieve SDG 13, a concerted political, economic and social undertaking to “flatten the curve” to avoid irreversible tipping points and prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The Ministerial Declaration is an opportunity to draw parallels between the pandemic and climate action while reaffirming key messages, including the need to trust scientists and act in accordance with the precautionary principle. These lessons should translate into ambitious action to close the emissions gap via the Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the swift transition to clean renewable energy

sources and rapid adoption of energy-efficient solutions, and to accelerate the phase-down of hydrofluorocarbons under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer. We must also ensure that the unprecedented financial resources made in response to the pandemic are disbursed in line with the SDGs and promote a green recovery.

- **Biodiversity Loss:** The Ministerial Declaration should give clear messages to increase measures to prevent the extinction of threatened species, particularly for those most at risk of extinction, and restore species of ecological importance. Without aggressive action to safeguard our biodiversity, humankind risks living in an empty planet. It is no coincidence that as we sheltered in our homes during the pandemic, wildlife reclaimed our parks and cities. The degree to which we have encroached upon their habitats and ecosystems is significant, and we must strengthen the transboundary collaboration in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. We must also strengthen regulations on the use of pesticides that impact biological diversity.
- **Ambient Air Quality:** The Ministerial Declaration should emphasize the need to take significant measures to improve and maintain air quality. In many impacted cities, the pandemic revealed a world without air pollution, which is a public-health crisis in its own right, offering a glimpse into a future of clean air. Efforts to improve and maintain air quality should continue and be strengthened, and air quality data should be publicly available.
- **Plastic Pollution.** Marine litter and microplastics has received significant attention at UNEA since its inaugural session. This has included the establishment of an ad hoc expert group, in which the Government of Rwanda is an active participant and supporter. In the past 1.5 years, we have witnessed a growing list of countries calling for global action to address plastic pollution, including the African continent at the Seventeenth Regular Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). The Ministerial Declaration presents an opportunity to take concrete steps towards international cooperation and coordination on this issue and should be supportive of a global agreement on plastic pollution as a major component of international action to deliver on SDG 14.1.

Additional Elements and Key Messages

The Government of Rwanda would further welcome a Ministerial Declaration at UNEA-5 that includes the following elements and key messages, where appropriate:

- **Biosafety Regulations.** The Ministerial Declaration should stress the importance of implementing biosafety regulations line with the Cartagena Protocol
- **Control and Prevention of Movements of Hazardous Waste.** The Ministerial Declaration should deliver a message to encourage cooperation to control movements of hazardous waste between nations and specifically prevent

transfer of hazardous waste from Developed to Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

- **Ecosystem-Based Adaptation:** The Ministerial Declaration should encourage Ecosystem Based Adaptation (EbA) to reduce the vulnerability of communities to climate change.

Moreover, as the highest-level decision-making body on the environment, UNEA can contribute to strengthening multilateral action for nature to achieve the SDGs:

- **Transboundary Collaboration.** The promotion of transboundary collaboration between countries to address certain transboundary challenges, such as pollution of water bodies and biodiversity conservation, among others.
- **Technical and Financial Support to Developing Countries.** The Ministerial Declaration should support developing countries with access funds, capacity building and adequate technologies (environmentally sound technologies) to strengthen the action for nature.