

Draft Outline Document for the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2021 UN Environment Assembly

Focus on the adopted theme "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable development Goals"

Vision: Urgent and transformative actions to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services are fundamental to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and rebuild a resilient and sustainable post-pandemic world.

Introduction: The science clearly identifies the urgent need for strengthened actions for nature to achieve sustainable development as called upon by the Rio+20 Outcome Document and Agenda 2030. COVID-19 has exposed how vulnerable our societies are and how connected we all are to each other and to nature. Healthy ecosystems are an important foundation to ensure healthy people, and loss of biodiversity undermines our individual and joint resilience. By protecting nature, we protect ourselves. Fully implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, including eradicating poverty, is dependent on taking these challenges seriously. The UN Environmental Assembly is our platform for joint action and to respond to the urgency and scale of the challenge, moving beyond statements to gather forces around concrete actions.

We are experiencing an alarming loss of biodiversity and ecosystems on land, in freshwater and in the oceans. Land use change, over-exploitation, climate change, pollution and invasive species are all undermining our ability to ensure a safe and healthy life for our own and generations to come. The individual threats to nature are interconnected and exacerbate each other. These complex interlinkages, and the global scale of the challenges, require holistic and transformative approaches from the world. That requires efforts by governments, all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and other economic actors all over the world. Rebuilding a resilient and sustainable post-pandemic world also requires a strong multilateral system, international partnerships, and dedication to effective implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals and other already agreed multilateral commitments including on means of implementation in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Together we can strengthen action to approach a positive scenario for our common home. This requires putting people and nature at the heart of decision-making.

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) issued a clear challenge in their 2019 Global Assessment Report¹ stating that "goals for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors." We have through our broad consultations identified three transformative areas for joint and positive action by UNEA5.

¹ IPBES (2019) Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Blue - Green recovery

Now is the time to build back better. We recognize the vulnerability of our society and our economy and the urgency of efforts for a post COVID-19 recovery that puts society on track for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals through strengthened action for nature. Leadership, science-based decision-making, involvement of stakeholders, and global cooperation will only be more important in the time to come. Ministers can promote regulations, incentives, financial instruments that respond to the COVID-19 situation while at the same time contributing to a low GHG emission economy based on sustainable production and consumption, circular economy, and a pollution-free world with vital ecosystem services and biodiversity. The ocean is vital to regulate the Earth's climate given its role in absorbing CO2. However, the level of GHG is jeopardizing its capacity to function well and deliver this and many other services to humanity, including food supply. It will be to our benefit that we reduce our environmental footprint and place people and nature at the heart of decision making.

The measures we take should work with nature and not against it and support nature-based solutions. The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and the 2018-2030 strategic framework of the UNCCD are timely opportunities. Land and sea degradation and loss of ecosystem services represent a 10% loss in global annual gross product and negatively impact on the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people². Ministers can draw attention to the benefits for biodiversity, climate change adaptation and mitigation, benefits for the economy, welfare and potential for jobs through ecosystem restoration. Ministers can consider ways for the public and private sector to take better account of biodiversity and ecosystem services and contribute to mainstreaming in decision-making processes across governments and economic sectors. Ministers may consider how the UN Environment Programme and the UN system as a whole can best support strengthened efforts for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals across their work and to support countries in this effort.

Healthy ecosystems, healthy people - Holistic approaches to protect and restore nature and ecosystem services – including nature-based solutions

Ministers may raise attention as to the importance of healthy ecosystems as a foundation to ensure healthy people, and that the considerable loss of biodiversity is undermining our joint resilience. It is the poorest among us who are most vulnerable. Zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 expose the close relationship between nature and people. We increase our vulnerability to such diseases through environmental degradation. This pandemic reveals the associated significant cost and the need for strengthened action to avoid future emergence of zoonotic diseases. Recognizing the rapid loss of nature, the piece by piece loss of natural habitat and the associated increasing risk for our societies, ministers can commit to measures to strengthened cross-sectoral efforts to protect biodiversity, reverse the degradation of ecosystems and enhance ecosystem resilience. This also as important measures to urgently adapt and mitigate climate change. Ministers can promote involvement of a broad range of actors in the development and scaling up of effective actions, including indigenous peoples and local communities, local and sub-national authorities, women and youth groups. Building

² IPBES (2018) The assessment report on land degradation and restoration.

Commented [CH1]: We face an immense challenge at the moment with the climate and environment crisis on the top of the COVID Pandemic. However, in order to turn these threats and disruptions into an opportunity that generates positive outcome, we must use the power of communicating the planet true needs. By adding a reference of 'Blue' to the call for 'Green recovery' we are not only tacking semantics, but we are communicating the idea that we need to address the whole globe, including the ocean that takes up to 70% of the Earth's surface.

Commented [CH2]: The ocean is being massively degraded by a suit of activities such as unsustainable fishing practices through to pollution. Not only species populations are declining, but whole habitats are being lost at a fast rate.

on this and given the developments around the order of environment-related international meetings in 2021, the ministers can commit to the development and effective implementation of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in China. Ministers can also emphasise the importance for enhancing synergies at all levels between the biodiversity related conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements in order to efficiently contribute to the implementation of the post 2020 global biodiversity framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ministers should also consider ways to support the work of the UNFCCC and the Paris agreement, thus contributing to the 26th Conference of the Parties in 2021 and the negotiations of the beyond 2020 instrument for the sound management of chemicals and waste. Moreover, Ministers should also consider and recognize that the success in achieving global goals on biodiversity requires that the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction is also robustly regulated. Therefore, Ministers should recommend the adoption and implementation of the UN legally binding instrument for the high seas* currently under negotiation.

Sustainable food systems – a part of the solution

Meeting the world's increasing demand for food while still reducing agriculture's environmental impacts is one of the defining challenges of our time, as stated in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) 2019 Global Assessment Report. Addressing solutions to the food system is an important opportunity for ministers at the environment assembly, as well as for the private sector, farmers and other stakeholders. Among the findings of the IPBES report is that feeding humanity and enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of nature are complementary and closely interdependent goals. They can be advanced through sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and livestock systems, the safeguarding of native species, varieties, breeds and habitats, and ecological restoration. The ministerial declaration can contribute to the growing understanding and attention to the environmental dimension of sustainable food systems, including how improvements in the different parts of the food systems are important for both people's livelihood and health, the environment and the economy, and its significance to be able to provide a healthy and affordable diet to the global population in decades to come. This is critical to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Ministers can highlight important approaches and solutions that are available and contribute to further measures to strengthen action at the UN Food Summit in 2021.

Commented [CH3]: The progress on negotiations and adoption of the BBNJ or high seas treaty is critical to close this gap on the international regulatory framework in regards to biodiversity. Circa 50% of the ocean is within the high seas, which currently lacks such a global framework.
*international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.