

**From:** Inger Andersen  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 01, 2020 11:14 AM  
**To:** Broadcast-UNEP  
**Subject:** Monthly letter -- August 2020

Dear colleagues,

I begin my letter with deepest condolences to colleagues affected by the [explosion in Beirut](#). The catastrophic explosion which ripped out the heart of a city and shook the soul of the nation, could not have come at a worse time for the country, and indeed the world. I have been in touch with many of our colleagues whose families have been impacted, and whose homes have been damaged or destroyed. I am proud of how quickly we our UNEP team has been able to deploy expertise on the ground through the UNEP-OCHA Joint Environment Unit.

As I write, urgent efforts are also underway in [Mauritius](#) to address the environmental impacts of an oil spill caused by a ship carrying some 4,000 tonnes of fuel and which ran aground in late July. While some 3,000 tonnes were evacuated of the oil from the ship prior to its break-up, it is estimated that about [1,000 tonnes spilled into the ocean](#). The spill occurred near the Blue Bay Marine Park reserve threatening a fragile and vital marine ecosystem. Again, through the UNEP-OCHA Joint Environment Unit, UNEP has deployed an oil expert and is working closely with the Government, the Resident Coordinator's office and other UN agencies to support recovery efforts. My deepest appreciation to Gary and the Conflicts and Disasters Branch for the rapid response and efforts underway both in Mauritius and in Lebanon. In parallel, we monitor with concern the [fires in California](#), [Brazil's Pantanal wetlands](#) to name but a few of the environmental catastrophes unfolding in different parts of the world.

### **Getting MTS-ready**

With so much happening, even as we tackle a global pandemic, I am impressed by the consistent churn underway to dry the ink on the [next Mid-Term Strategy \(MTS-2022-2025\)](#). We are looking at two more rounds of consultations with Member States at the 151<sup>st</sup> Committee of Permanent Representatives in September and then at the Annual Sub-committee in October. The [Programme of Work and Budget \(2022-2023\)](#) are also shaping up well, informed by the transformation process, aiming to land at a sharper, more impactful and efficient UNEP. A big thanks to Tim Kasten and Ebrahim Gora and their outstanding team for all the work underway on the MTS and to Sonja and Fadi for leading the work on the budget preparation.

Having a coherent and focused new MTS should not be seen as a destination but rather as an entry point to align our systems, operations, procedures and, dare I say, culture, to be able to deliver in a more impactful manner as of 2022. Building on the excellent work that is being done in a number of areas to strengthen our organization, we will have to work together to ensure that by the end of 2021, UNEP will be in a position to respond to the promise of an ambitious strategy.

### **Repositioning our work with the private sector**

As part of our efforts to continue strengthening UNEP, it is time to align the work of the Private Sector Unit and enable stronger corporate-level engagement. For this reason, I have decided to move the Private Sector Unit from the Governance Affairs Office to the Corporate Services Division with effect from 1 October 2020. The

Private Sector Unit has contributed tremendously in the past few years to widening the “tent”, by bringing in the private sector in conversations and strategies around the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Whether through the adoption of the first UNEP Strategy for Private Sector Engagement, scaling up joint ventures and collaboration, or driving private sector participation at the UN Environment Assembly, the Unit has made great strides. The Corporate Services Division is well-positioned to take this important work forward. My appreciation to Jorge for his leadership in putting our Private Sector Unit on such a strong footing, to Kamar Yousuf for steering the Unit, and to both Jorge and Sonja for the deeply collaborative discussions in the lead up to this decision. I count on all colleagues to support this seamless transition, and to many milestones ahead!

### **Strong financial footing**

A word on UNEP’s finances because colleagues, we are in a strong position because of the hard work of so many. At US\$ 71 million for 2020, Environment Fund pledges are well ahead of last year. We are already at 95 per cent of our estimated for the year. We are also seeing several Member States increasing their contributions, even in these difficult times. I see this as an outcome of our efforts to sharpen controls, strengthen focus and land on better results. Nevertheless, mindful that we don’t know what 2021 will bring, we will continue to be prudent with regards to expenditure controls that we have put in place, such as Executive Office approval on filling Environment Fund vacancies.

### **Working differently: the outlook for UNEA**

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that we need to change the way we do business and this is a reality that we will have to continue to contend with in 2021, and in particular – the fifth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 5). It is clear that a full-scale, in-person UNEA 5 in early 2021 will not happen. The Governance Affairs Office is working on a list of alternate options, and my thanks again to Jorge and his team who are working tirelessly on exploring the shape and form of UNEA 5. Irrespective of the decisions by Member States, it is important that we remain adaptable, with a clear line of sight on delivering results and on our mandate.

### **Release of the Global Tailings Standards**

A great example of this consistent approach is from the Economy Division which launched the [Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management \(the Standard\)](#), establishing the [first global standard on tailings management](#) this month. In the aftermath of such devastating events like the Brumadinho tailings facility collapse in Brazil, the Standard significantly raises the bar for the industry to achieve strong social, environmental and technical outcomes and move towards zero-harm to people and the environment. Well done Ligia, Elisa Tonda and the Economy Division for what is a great outcome to work that began in 2019. I look forward to hearing progress on supporting implementation of this important Standard to secure the health of people and the environment.

### **West Asia Ministerial Meeting**

I was pleased to [address](#) Environment Ministers of West Asia on environmental priorities post-COVID-19. This was a very significant achievement for UNEP, because in spite of the deep divisions in the region, we were able to convene Ministers for a discussion on building back better in a post-COVID-19 world. My appreciation to Sami and the West Asia Office for this achievement.

### **Moving sustainability from the margins to mainstream – India**

At the tenth Anniversary celebrations of the Indian think tank, the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, I [called](#) on all countries to take earnest efforts to make real the promise of Paris and to also stretch their commitments in the new

Nationally Determined Contributions. I also made it clear that the economic jump-start cannot and must not be done at the expense of the environment. In this context, I urged the government of India to look closely at the new draft Environmental Impact Assessment Notification 2020 to ensure it provides adequate safeguards across the full spectrum of environmental impacts. My thanks to Dechen, Atul Bagai and the rest of the India Office for their efforts.

### **COVID-19 recovery: “Make or Break” moment for the planet**

Terming COVID-19 recovery as a “make-or-break” moment for the health of our planet, the UN Secretary-General [outlined](#) six climate positive actions for countries as we reboot our economies. And in this “make-or break” moment, we need all hands on deck, I am very [proud](#) of UNEP’s partnership with the Playing for the Planet Alliance which is working with developers of huge mobile games, encouraging players to think about the environment. I am excited to see the gaming industry throw its weight behind global efforts to reverse the climate crisis. My appreciation to Susan, Sam Barratt and his team at the Ecosystems Division for these partnerships.

### **Finding nature a home in the UN**

Many of you may recall that I reported in my May letter of a decision taken by the Chief Executive Board endorsing a stronger focus on biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development across the UN. The Secretary-General is keen to see this critical area mainstreamed across UN policy. This is both a massive opportunity and an enormous undertaking for UNEP. I am very pleased that our thinking on this area is beginning to take shape and thanks to the leadership of Satya, Susan and Corli, we are developing a paper on actions that can drive a coordinated, system-wide focus on biodiversity, one that goes beyond a pure focus on conservation.

### **Taking a break – we’re in this for the long-haul**

As we enter a sixth month of COVID19-induced alternate working arrangements, I want to remind colleagues that this is a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourselves and take enough breaks to run the course. I hope many of you have been able to take a break this past two months, but if not, I urge you to consider taking time off. On a return to office, several of our offices have a partial, voluntary return to office. I assure you, Joyce and I will continue to exercise maximum caution on all return-to-office plans. This month also saw the world reach a grim milestone of 25 million infections. No matter where we are in the world, whether restrictions are being eased or tightened, we cannot let our guard down. We need to continue to maintain social distance, and abide by WHO guidelines on [wearing masks](#), hand washing and so on.

And with this, I sign-off for the month.

My warmest wishes to you all as we look to a virtual UN General Assembly and UN Biodiversity Summit.

Inger

PS. You can always check out what I am up to by following me on [@andersen inger](#)