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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP):

- First session of the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly
(22 and 23 February 2021, online session)

= Statements by the European Union and its Member States

Delegations will find in the [Annex](#) for information a compilation of statements as delivered during the first session of the Fifth meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5).

First session of the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly

(22 and 23 February 2021, online session)

Opening Statement

*Mr. President,
Madame Executive Director
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

- It is my pleasure and honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.
- Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.
- Allow me to start by congratulating the UNEA Presidency and the Executive Director of UNEP and commending all Member States for standing firm and committed to the organisation of this online session despite the challenging times we are living in. The environment must not be forgotten because of COVID-19.
- As we gather at this digital UNEA, the highest level of global environmental governance, we wish to convey a strong message to the global community on the urgency for decisive action to address the pressing challenges we are all facing today.
- Faced with one of the greatest challenges in generations, humankind's strength and resilience has been put to a test by the pandemic. We all suffer from it, with devastating health and socioeconomic consequences, as well as with harshened environmental threats. But COVID-19 has also offered us the opportunity to revisit the fundamental role of nature and the environment and the need to thrive for sustainability. This is our mission today and will be our mission for tomorrow.
- The world is undergoing changes that affect us all and to which we must provide sustainable, responsible and global responses. More than ever before, it is urgent to work together for an inclusive economic and societal recovery from this global humanitarian crisis, one that takes us closer to a truly green and fair transition.
- UNEP's report "Making peace with Nature", is very clear: 1) Our current development model degrades the Earth's finite capacity to sustain human well-being; 2) So far, we have been unable to meet most of our commitments to limit environmental damage; 3) We need a clear break with current trends of environmental decline if we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Distinguished colleagues, this online session of UNEA must be an example of how, with the right amount of political will and determination from us all, we can move things forward.
- The UNEA-5 theme is timely indeed! “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” is not a slogan, it is a necessity. Nature cannot wait. Neither the rest of our pressing environmental and socio-economic challenges. Time is short and 2030 is around the corner.
- The EU and its Member States welcome the decisions recommended for adoption by this Assembly. UNEP’s ground breaking Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2025 and the Programme of Work and Budget 2022-2023 take a more holistic approach and its design supports the Secretary General’s UN reform process for enhanced delivery by the UN on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. It gives clear directions to tackle the environmental crisis with a focus on the need to address the main drivers, first and foremost through much needed transition to a more sustainable consumption and production development model. We stand ready to support its implementation.
- The EU and its Member States further appreciate and support the efforts by the UNEA President to preserve a level of ambition that meets the urgent need to address specific global challenges for the environment and human health, such as waste, chemicals, marine litter and plastics.
- We shall continue our work, however, in the months to come. Crucial environmental summits are ahead of us, including the Conferences of the Parties for the three Rio Conventions. We have an enormous opportunity here to change things for the better of our Planet and accelerate the action on climate, biodiversity, land, chemicals and waste and sustainable food systems.
- Moreover, we need a global agreement on plastics to tackle the ever pressing problem of plastic pollution. It is our hope that we are able to join forces and launch these important negotiations at the resumed UNEA-5 session next year.
- The EU has embarked on a fundamental change of our economic model that addresses wasteful use of resources and puts nature at the centre while strengthening our resilience. The European Green Deal and its rapid implementation, with the recently adopted European strategies on circular economy, climate neutrality, biodiversity, food systems and chemicals, to mention a few, are a clear testimony of the EU determination and commitment.
- But we need everybody to join efforts in a global transition to a climate-neutral, resource efficient and circular economy, with a view to also continue to engage in enhanced international cooperation and strengthen global environmental governance.
- We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the UNEA president, our host country Kenya and UNEP for launching the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP, during this virtual session of UNEA-5. We look forward to collaborating in the intersessional period leading up to the resumed UNEA-5 to ensure a successful commemoration that honours the achievements of UNEP in the past 50 years.

- Mr. President, Madame Executive Director, this virtual session of the Environment Assembly is only a beginning and a good start for what we must enact urgently in 2021 and the years to come in our Action for Nature. We are looking forward to the resumed in-person UNEA session in February next year to continue the hard work. The UN Secretary General made it very clear in his address during the launch of UNEP's report "Making Peace with Nature" that 2021 is a "make it or break it year" for Nature, with several upcoming important environmental Conferences of the Parties, followed by the resumed session of UNEA in 2022. Collectively, we must work to take action in the year to come.

Thank you.

Statement on agenda item 9

"Commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972"

- President Kenyatta, President Rotevatn, Madame Executive Director, Ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning/afternoon/evening to you all.
- It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States. Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.
- The EU and its Member States would like to express their full support to the UN Environment Programme and its highest governing body, the UN Environment Assembly, meeting here today in this virtual session, as well as our firm commitment to a strong multilateral system that works for the benefit of all.
- Today, with the planetary crisis deepening as we speak, UNEP and UNEA's work is indeed more relevant, but also more urgent, than ever!
- The UN Environment Programme is turning 50 next year. This is indeed a very important anniversary, which deserves to be celebrated by the global community. We are fully behind the host country, Kenya, and honoured to contribute to this well-deserved tribute. We stand ready to help making these celebrations an opportunity for collective engagement.
- We very much welcome the Assembly's decision to hold the UNEP@50 celebrations in Nairobi in March 2022 in conjunction with the resumed session of UNEA-5. We are convinced that the format agreed, a Special Session, will ensure an impactful commemoration with broad as well as high-level participation.

- The EU and its Member States see UNEP@50 as a way of raising awareness of the added value of UNEP and its fundamental role for driving the international environmental agenda and environmental and sustainability governance, and recognise its role and support to the work undertaken so far under UNGA Resolution 73/333 on international environmental governance and international environmental law. As we will finalize this process at the resumed session of UNEA-5, the EU and its MS reiterate that the UNEP@50 commemorations that will be held in March 2022, constitute an excellent opportunity to adopt the final outcome of this process in the form of a high-level political declaration. That said, we are of course mindful of the role of the Presidency and the Bureau of the Sixth meeting of UNEA and do not wish to prejudge its guidance on the matter.
- The EU and its Member States would also like to reaffirm their full support to the offer made by Sweden to host Stockholm+50, a UN high-level meeting, in June 2022, fifty years after the Stockholm conference of 1972, and the related work taken forward in New York, concerning the adoption of an enabling resolution. We see these two events, UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50, as distinctly different, but interrelated, complementary and mutually reinforcing.
- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the EU and its Member States are fully committed to these important milestones in the history of global environmental governance, and we count on the active engagement of all member states and the entire global community to make the celebrations truly resounding successes.

Thank you.

Statement on agenda item 12

“Adoption of the resolutions, decisions and outcome document of the session”

President Rotevatn, Madame Executive Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The EU and its Member States would like to express once again their deepest appreciation to your Presidency, and to you personally, for your tireless efforts to mobilize the full membership to adopt this message. Your search for consensus around an ambitious message from this online session of the UN Environment Assembly must be praised. The circumstances were not easy indeed and this amplifies the merit of your efforts.
- We also thank the Committee of Permanent Representatives and its Chair, who prepared this session of UNEA and especially the important and novel Medium Term Strategy that will guide the work of UNEP for the next four years, in a way that takes into account the global environmental crisis, and with a focus on the importance of the driving forces behind it and therefore the need to implement sustainable consumption and production practices.

- We cannot be complacent however. Climate change is relentless. Biodiversity is being lost as we speak, maybe forever. Our rivers and air are polluted, our soil degraded.
- Our 2030 Agenda ambitions are very high, yet we only have a few years left to meet our targets. For many of them, we are either late or we are on the wrong track. We need to catch-up. We have no time to waste. No time to be timid. Now it is the time to be audacious and ambitious. As the Secretary General said on Thursday at the launch of the Synthesis Report “Making Peace with Nature”, 2021 may be a decisive year for action, if we are to succeed in changing the trajectory towards planetary deterioration of no return.
- It is with this sense of urgency that the EU and its Member States would have appreciated an even higher level of ambition expressed in this message. Yet, we appreciate and support it. But we can do better, much better!
- Over the next two years, we will have many opportunities to do better, and do more, and I sincerely hope we will. On all the pressing challenges, from climate to biodiversity; from land to food systems; from chemicals and waste to plastic pollution, to the solutions in shifts in our productions and consumption patterns, including through resource-efficiency and the promotion of the circular economy.
- We are showing the way with our European Green Deal. Words are not enough! We take action and move forward. Our Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency launched yesterday is a promising track of global collective engagement. We hope to see its membership grow rapidly. And where there is political will, action will follow.
- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the second and *in-person* session of UNEA5 is around the corner. Twelve months to go. We have a collective responsibility to come forward with an ambitious programme to address the challenges we are facing. Decisions cannot be deferred any longer. We are already late. Let’s do it.

Thank you.
