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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: A brief perspective on environmental priorities and opportunities for 2020
- Information from the Presidency and the UNEP Executive Director

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note by the Presidency and the UNEP Executive Director on the above subject, to be dealt with under 'Any other business' at the Council (Environment) meeting on 19 December 2019.

A brief perspective on environmental priorities and opportunities for 2020

- Information from the Presidency and the UNEP Executive Director -

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and people to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. The Medium Term Strategy sets out the UNEP vision, objectives, priorities and impact measures for 2018-2021.

The **Global Environment Outlook 6** (UNEP, 2019) indicates that the world is not on track to achieve the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals or other internationally agreed environmental goals by 2030; nor is it on track to deliver long-term sustainability by 2050. Urgent action and strengthened international cooperation are urgently needed to reverse those negative trends and restore planetary and human health.

The year 2020 promises to be a ‘Super Year’ for environmental decision-making, in the sense of the Paris Agreement coming into effect and a decision expected on the post-2020 biodiversity framework (CBD COP-15). Major events to be held next year include the UN Ocean Conference (Lisbon, Portugal), the IUCN World Conservation Congress (Marseille, France) and the Summit on Biodiversity at the level of Heads of States and Governments (UNGA resolution 73/234). Getting 2020 right is an imperative to setting the sustainability decade 2020-2030 on the right course.

In this context, it is worth noting that a number of priorities and opportunities lie ahead for the year 2020:

1. The decarbonizing imperative

UNEP's 2030 vision is that countries are more resilient to the adverse impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions are significantly reduced, including emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. To realize this 2030 vision, national adaptation plans must be institutionalized and progressively implemented. At the same time, Governments will need to adopt strategies to reduce their emissions and increase their investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Forest loss and forest degradation will need to be reduced, and forest conservation and restoration will need to be enhanced.

The **Emissions Gap Report 2019** warns that unless global greenhouse gas emissions fall by 7.6 per cent each year between 2020 and 2030, the world will miss the opportunity to get on track towards the 1.5°C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement (UNEP, 2019). Even if all current unconditional commitments under the Paris Agreement are implemented, temperatures are expected to rise by 3.2°C, bringing even wider-ranging and more destructive climate impacts. Collective ambition must increase more than fivefold over current levels to deliver the cuts needed over the next decade for the 1.5°C goal.

The year 2020 is a critical year for climate action, with the UNFCCC COP 26 in Glasgow, UK aiming to determine the future course of efforts to avert crisis, and countries expected to significantly step up their climate commitments.

2. The decoupling imperative

UNEP's 2030 vision is enhanced and sustained prosperity for all, through circular and more efficient use of the planet's resources and sustainable and equitable consumption, transforming economic structures to be greener and more inclusive. UNEP supports the transition towards sustainable consumption and production, decoupling economic growth from unsustainable resource use and negative environmental impact while improving human well-being. This objective is in line with SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production).

The **Global Resources Outlook** (UNEP, 2019) mentions that the use of natural resources has more than tripled from 1970 and continues to grow. It also indicates that the decoupling of natural resource use and environmental impacts from economic activity and human well-being is an essential element in the transition to a sustainable future.

An opportunity in 2020 in this regard will be the high-level political forum on sustainable development which is to meet in July under the theme "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

3. The detoxifying imperative

UNEP's 2030 vision is that negative environmental and human health impacts from harmful chemicals, hazardous and other waste, and air pollution will be significantly reduced, contributing to a cleaner planet for all. This vision builds on the United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions on chemicals and waste and air quality. By achieving the vision, UNEP is expected to contribute significantly to the Sustainable Development Goal targets 3.9, 6.3, 7.a, 11.6, 12.4 and 12.5.

The **Global Chemicals Outlook** (UNEP, 2019) mentions that the global goal to minimize adverse impacts of chemicals and waste will not be achieved by 2020. Solutions exist, but more ambitious worldwide action by all stakeholders is urgently required. It notes that whilst international treaties and voluntary instruments have reduced the risks of some chemicals and wastes, but progress has been uneven and implementation gaps remain. As of 2018, more than 120 countries had not implemented the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals.

In 2020, in particular, future arrangements of the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 will be submitted for consideration and adoption at the next session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) to be held in Bonn, Germany, from 5 to 9 October.

4. Nature-based solutions

UNEP's 2030 vision is that biodiversity conservation and integrated ecosystems management will result in healthier marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems that provide benefits such as clean water, secure food supply, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and aesthetic value, supporting the well-being of men, women and children.

At the 2019 Climate Action Summit, Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) took the centre stage. The Summit brought political attention to the potential power of nature and the solutions that it can provide for the climate crisis and underlined the growing movement supporting greater action in support of NBS for climate. It is now critical to seize the momentum gathered at the Summit and to take forward the follow-up process. UNEP will be the UN System convener for NBS follow up process, working in full collaboration with UNDP and other partners, particularly FAO and World Bank, to convene stakeholders to proactively connect them in their endeavours for system change, generating and scaling up commitments and actions which will move-the needle by the end of 2020, so that 2020-2030 will be the decade of exponential implementation.

Building on the attention and momentum that the Summit focussed on NBS, the 2020 'Super Year' provides an unprecedented opportunity to chart a new course and exponentially accelerate action at scale in the coming decade. Two delivery vehicles in this respect are the UN-REDD Programme and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Theme of UNEA 5

The theme for the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly, which will take place from 22 – 26 February 2021 in Nairobi will be **“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”**.

The theme was decided at the Joint meeting of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 3 December 2019 based on the extensive consultations with the Committee of Permanent Representatives and Stakeholders.

The theme aims to connect people with nature and challenge individuals to understand, experience and cherish the vital interdependent relationship between people and nature. The theme underpins the importance of actions towards enhancing a healthy environment, and the benefits of nature for all aspects of sustainable development to provide solutions to combat climate change, halt loss of biodiversity, reduce pollution, and end poverty.
