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**Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity
of all – our responsibility, our opportunity**
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Leadership dialogue 3: Accelerating the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Background paper by the Secretariat

I. About the leadership dialogues

1. Stockholm+50, the international meeting to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972, is both a commemoration and a time for bold action and engagement. It presents an opportunity to reflect and connect, and to accelerate and scale actions for a better future on a healthy planet with prosperity for all.
2. The importance of a healthy planet for human progress and prosperity is highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has been underscored by the continuing crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. A degraded planet poses limits on well-being and prosperity, creating obstacles to a better future. The concept note entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”¹ is an introduction to the global challenge of achieving a healthy planet and to opportunities for expressing renewed commitment at the international meeting.
3. The aim of the Stockholm+50 leadership dialogues is to engage governments, international organizations, business and industry, civil-society organizations – including organizations for young people, women, indigenous peoples and local communities, and rural communities – and other relevant stakeholders in an exchange of ideas on opportunities to overcome barriers to implementation, connect actions, and create new, intergenerational pathways for change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. The present background paper reflects the discussions held during the first round of informal working group meetings in March 2022 and the interventions of Member States and of Major Groups and Stakeholders of the United Nations Environment Programme during the Stockholm+50 preparatory meeting held on 28 March 2022 in New York under the auspices of the General Assembly. Key messages from the preparatory meeting that are relevant to all three leadership dialogues include an emphasis on the

¹ A/CONF.238/3.

engagement of groups of young people and the central importance of intergenerational equity in the potential outcomes of the international meeting.

5. Leadership dialogue 3, whose theme is “Accelerating the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development in the context of the decade of action”, addresses the specific actions needed to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse impacts on people, the planet and prosperity and to put the world back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. The context and issues

6. The challenges that the world is facing today require a deeper commitment to collective action than ever before. Ground-breaking agreements for underpinning action on sustainable development were reached at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in 2015, and the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in New York in 2015. While each agreement has been instrumental in establishing the foundations of progress towards sustainable development, they are no longer adequate in the face of a fundamentally altered world. Science has shown that the planet – and thus the economies, societies and people depending on it – is under severe and growing pressure.² To put the world’s development journey back on track, it will be necessary to build on and scale up existing commitments, thoughtfully leverage the opportunities offered by advances in digital technologies, and continue to acknowledge and act in keeping with the interconnections among the different aspects of the environment, especially as regards climate change, biodiversity loss and proliferating pollution – the triple planetary crisis. Environmental, economic and social crises must be tackled together, with a speed and scale that match the urgency and magnitude of challenges facing humanity. At the same time, the specific needs of each country must be acknowledged and principles such as equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and the respective capabilities of countries should guide action.

A. Accelerating the mobilization of finance

7. At Rio+20, countries made ambitious commitments to green economic transitions as a pathway to poverty reduction and sustainable development. Subsequently, in 2015, at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Member States adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, a global framework to guide the financing of sustainable development. Since then, many socioeconomic models have been created for low-carbon, resource-efficient, circular, nature-positive (or at least nature-neutral) and socially inclusive development, with each country sovereign in choosing its direction.

8. To accelerate action for a sustainable, just and fair transformation of the overall financial ecosystem, bold, impactful and innovative measures are needed, along with enabling policy environments, characterized by coherent environmental, social and economic policies and appropriate incentive frameworks. Advances are needed in the design of credible and verifiable implementation standards and taxonomies to underpin voluntary action and commitments and to guide sustainable investment. The special needs and concerns of micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises and smallholder farms should

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Summary for Policymakers of the report *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (2018); Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019); United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People* (2019); United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions* (2019); Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* (2019); International Resource Panel, *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want* (United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi, 2019); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Anthropocene (In)Securities – Reflections on Collective Survival 50 Years after the Stockholm Conference*, E. Lövbrand and M. Mobjörk (eds.), SIPRI Research Report No. 26 (2021).

be acknowledged and integrated in the global financial and policy architecture to enable them to contribute more productively to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. In addition to climate financing, which should be balanced between mitigation and adaptation priorities, it is critical to channel financing to biodiversity conservation and to preventing and addressing pollution. At the same time, the convergence and harmonization of climate and biodiversity finance through innovative financing models and nature-based solutions should be promoted to maximize the social and economic benefits of the sustainability transformation. Green finance should enable the transition of the whole economy, including the informal economy, and should contribute to inclusive prosperity for all and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, to date, lack of policy support and financing for innovative and inspiring transformational efforts has hampered momentum, particularly in developing and least developed countries.

10. Although the \$100 billion climate finance commitment made at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2009 has yet to be met, there was modest progress at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, held in Glasgow in 2021, including through increases in pledges to the Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund. Such commitments must be scaled up to ensure the realization of the post-2025 climate finance goal and implementation plan (with a floor of \$100 billion) and linked initiatives, such as the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. The commitments must be linked to developments in the private sector.³

11. As the world begins to emerge from COVID-19, humanity has an opportunity to build on the momentum of recovery processes, to redesign economies to be socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, and to steer job creation and economic growth to accelerate the green economic transformation. Ensuring nascent recoveries do not get buried under an avalanche of debt is a critical priority.

B. Governance and institutional reform

12. Finance alone will not fill the policy and capacity void. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires a renewal of multilateralism and the strengthening of institutions to be fit for purpose and to deliver decent green jobs, social protection, education, housing, and universal access to food, water, clean energy and internet connectivity, by 2030, as basic human rights. The relationships and interactions between people and the planet are characterized by complexity and often lead to unpredictable outcomes. Consequently, sustainable development efforts need to embrace uncertainty and complexity in order to generate robust and equitable collaboration and learning.⁴

13. More specifically, for accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, policy coherence is needed at the upstream and macroeconomic levels. Governance for sustainable development entails the consideration of interlinkages and synergies between its different dimensions, goals and targets to facilitate triple-win solutions. Durable progress towards the achievement of the Goals requires decision-making processes, institutions and policies that are underpinned by systemic approaches to finding solutions that protect nature, reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, produce high-quality and decent jobs and prosperity, and leave no one behind. Promoting greater and more affordable access to the technologies essential for sustainable development has become more relevant than ever before for least developed and developing countries. Policy coherence and collaborative action are required from all actors, and across all sectors.

14. More needs to be done to expand the capacities of environmental ministries and authorities and to improve collaboration and knowledge exchange with other ministries, in particular ministries of finance, economic planning, industry and energy, as well as business and labour organizations, to enhance policy

³ Financial institutions representing \$130 trillion, about 40 per cent of the global financial system, committed themselves in Glasgow to full decarbonization. However, work is only beginning on the reconfigured financial system required to remain within the limit of 1.5°C of climate warming.

⁴ E. Bennet and B. Reyers, "People-planet relationships across scales: multilevel environmental governance for transformations to sustainable and equitable futures", contribution to the forthcoming collection *Reimagining the Human-Environment Relationship: A Global Policy Reflection on Alternative Paradigms for Our Collective Well-Being in Support of Stockholm+50* (United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, supported by International Development Research Centre, Canada).

coherence and encourage cross-sectoral and systemic approaches to identifying pathways to sustainability. Doing so would help to catalyse a new generation of institutions with decision-making grounded in inclusive, green, circular and regenerative economic models.

15. It must be ensured that young people have not only a voice but also equitable access to key enablers of substantive participation, including quality education, knowledge platforms and a safe internet. Civil-society organizations and other key stakeholders need to be protected and strengthened in the light of the crucial role they play in holding Governments accountable on progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The design of global participation and inclusion mechanisms must include external and binding monitoring and accountability measures related to biodiversity and climate policies and commitments, and prior consultation with indigenous peoples.⁵ The social contract between governments, citizens and companies must be renewed, including with regard to social media, and trust must be rebuilt and a comprehensive vision of human rights embraced that includes a healthy, clean and sustainable environment for all.

C. Digital transformation and effective partnerships

16. The meaningful participation of all people, especially young people, in all aspects of production and consumption is vital to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As drivers of change, young people are important partners in meeting all targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to economic growth, employment and the environment. Young people are also increasingly interacting and transacting through mobile applications – with an increased desire to adopt a sustainable lifestyle. Key challenges include protecting the privacy of users, making digitalization an engine of job-rich green growth, and strengthening the agency of “digitally native” youth to make more sustainable choices using digital channels. Prompted by the voice of youth, all generations are needed on board to ensure that climate and environmental justice are at the heart of all action for sustainable lifestyles.⁶

17. The digital revolution is fundamentally reshaping socioeconomic relationships and presenting significant enabling opportunities for progress related to people, planet and prosperity. Nearly 5 billion people are now connected online, and at least 60 per cent of global GDP passes through digital channels.⁷ Digital technologies can hardwire sustainability outcomes and behaviours directly into the platforms and algorithms of the digital economy. Perhaps more importantly, they can help drive the systemic and societal innovations and transformations needed to achieve environmental sustainability.

18. However, rigorous and transparent monitoring is required to achieve the desired outcomes. Since digital technologies have the power to reach and influence people on a global scale, who wields that power and how it can be directed towards planetary sustainability while protecting privacy and security are among the most important governance questions of the current era.

19. Wealth is trickling up rather than down, much faster than ever before, and a renewed focus is required on trade, economic and fiscal policies to reinforce and support governance ambitions. National and global partnerships are important for scaling up and accelerating the achievement of the Goals and their impact. Many partnerships already exist and can help accelerate the creation of a job-rich green economy, recovery from COVID-19, and the transition towards more sustainable lifestyle choices, which, together with economic and financial instruments, strengthen our collective ability to implement the 2030 Agenda.

⁵ M. Paredes, “Voice and resistance in the claim for climate justice in the Amazon”, contribution to the forthcoming collection *Reimagining the Human-Environment Relationship: A Global Policy Reflection on Alternative Paradigms for Our Collective Well-Being in Support of Stockholm+50* (United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, supported by International Development Research Centre, Canada).

⁶ “The per capita footprint of the richest 10% is more than 10 times the 1.5C-consistent target for 2030, and more than 30 times higher than the poorest 50%,” according to T. Gore, “Confronting carbon inequality: putting climate justice at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery”, OXFAM Media Briefing, 21 Sept. 2020. See also International Labour Organization, “Youth employment”, available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang-en/index.htm>, accessed 5 May 2022.

⁷ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Digital Economy Report 2021: Cross-Border Data Flows and Development: For Whom the Data Flow* (United Nations publications, New York, 2021).

D. Collective action and strengthened cooperation

20. The global crisis requires a shared global response and a renewed multilateral system that is coherent, coordinated and comprehensive in its response to new threats and challenges. The report of the Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda” provides a new vision for how multilateralism can adapt to the threats of the twenty-first century. In September 2020, Member States of the United Nations affirmed, in the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, “Our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism... Only together can we build resilience against future pandemics and other global challenges. Multilateralism is not an option but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient, and more sustainable world.”⁸

III. Key messages and recommended urgent actions

Message 1. Financing for development and environment must be massively scaled up, aligning public and private portfolios with the Sustainable Development Goals, nationally determined contributions and the targets of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

(a) Larger volumes of finance for sustainable development from a more diverse set of sources need to be made available to developing and least developed countries, quickly and at a lower cost. Financial flows in support of sustainable development should ensure balance between adaptation and mitigation efforts, ensure gender equality, and respect countries’ right to development.

(b) To bridge the climate finance gap and identify current obstacles and needs, it is important to provide an accurate and verified accounting of the status of the commitment made at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to deliver \$100 billion in climate financing.

(c) It is a priority to implement well-designed and sequenced reform of environmentally harmful subsidies. These reforms should be developed through a multi-stakeholder engagement approach and complemented by compensation mechanisms for the most vulnerable. Such an approach will give vital breathing space to severely constrained budgets and allow for the reallocation of scarce resources to investments that can deliver sustainable and inclusive prosperity for current and future generations.

(d) Capacity-building for the mobilization of domestic finance needs to be strengthened, in particular to strengthen taxation capabilities and to combat illicit and environmentally harmful financial flows.

(e) The International Monetary Fund should consider a new, augmented round of special drawing rights linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. Sovereign debt guarantees and comprehensive debt relief and forgiveness are urgently needed to avoid debt crises and build the trust and solidarity needed to enhance means of implementation and accelerate their deployment. It is important to consider debt climate and nature swaps as a possible tool for financing climate change action.

(f) Regional and/or global risk-pooling mechanisms in the context of climate change and nature investments are another key measure that must be urgently implemented. It is crucial to use de-risking tools to facilitate the translation of financial assets into financial flows for a strengthened response to the triple planetary crisis.

(g) It is necessary to ensure that all financing, public and private, no longer exacerbates but rather mitigates climate change and pollution and supports nature-based solutions and biodiversity conservation. Public and private portfolios should be systematically screened for environmental and socioeconomic impacts, and both disclosures and actions to actively minimize the negative effects of investments on socioeconomic and environmental sustainability need to be scaled up. Credible, transparent and science-based sustainable finance taxonomies, a conducive enabling environment, and impact measurement methodologies are crucial for both measuring and improving the alignment of all finance flows with national and international sustainable development commitments and strategies.

⁸ A/RES/75/1.

(h) The social and environmental impacts of production and consumption patterns should be internalized in the pricing of goods and services to incentivize more sustainable consumption and production and circular economy transitions.

(i) Partnerships are also needed for a comprehensive, sustainable, job-rich and inclusive socioeconomic transformation. Training is needed for corporate leaders to deepen their commitment to drive change from the top in order to maximize the social and environmental co-benefits of their business operations.

Message 2. Governance systems need to be coherent and agile, responsive to the needs of all age groups and in particular those of young people, respectful of indigenous peoples and local communities, gender-positive by default, and synchronized in designing participatory and systemic local solutions to global and existential challenges.

(a) More agile governance models are needed to adapt regulatory frameworks based on real-time policy impact feedback and to ensure equality and fairness in the informal sector and in digital and financial outcomes.

(b) Transfer of knowledge, know-how and technology must be accelerated and access to digital goods and services and critical infrastructure scaled up. However, the risks of unequal access to digital technology and literacy, and potential harmful effects of internet platforms, must be considered, and thoughtful and timely regulation is needed to ensure digital inclusion and literacy for all.

(c) Clear signals are needed on digital data regulation. Stockholm+50 is an important stepping stone to the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly and to the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Innovation will be key to solving global challenges.

(d) The global, interlinked challenges of today require systemic solutions. That means addressing economic, social and environmental crises comprehensively and coherently. It is also urgent to address deep-seated inequalities and rethink the ways in which progress is measured, transcending traditional GDP metrics. Environmental protection and economic growth must be mutually supportive and deliver social well-being, health and prosperity for people and planet.

Message 3. Strengthened multilateralism is crucial for enhancing and accelerating the deployment of means of implementation. Multilateralism needs to be strengthened through deeper policy coherence, adherence to evidence-based policy design and concerted actions promoted across and within Governments.

(a) To achieve durable and sustainable socioeconomic transformations, local history, knowledge and sociocultural context must be acknowledged and respected by development actors and integrated into strategies and financing. An approach based on the principles of gender equality, women's empowerment and respect for the right to development is imperative to ensure that no one is left behind.

(b) Multilateral commitments need to be strengthened to address common challenges in a manner that respects the development needs of developing and least developed countries.

(c) Rebuilding trust starts with recognizing that international climate and economic policy is exacerbating the inequalities it is trying to resolve. It must be recognized that combating inequality within and between nations is at the heart of addressing planetary and development crises.

(d) Broad-based partnerships are needed to support countries in designing and implementing integrated policies and enabling a unified approach to addressing environmental and socioeconomic crises.