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**Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity  
of all – our responsibility, our opportunity**  
Stockholm, 2 and 3 June 2022

## **Leadership dialogue 1: Reflecting on the urgent need for action to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity for all**

### **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 imposes 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”<sup>1</sup> 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 that took place 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 engagement of groups of young people and the central importance of intergenerational equity in the potential outcomes of the international meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> A/CONF.238/3.

5. Leadership dialogue 1, whose theme is “Reflecting on the urgent need for action to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity for all”, focuses on the urgent need for action to achieve a healthy planet with prosperity for all, where people’s aspirations and rights can be fulfilled.

## **II. The context**

6. A number of key multilateral meetings and conferences have been or will be held in 2022, including the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the celebration of UNEP@50; the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification the resumed fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity; the twenty-seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the 2022 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (United Nations Ocean Conference); and the Transforming Education Summit. Many other initiatives to contribute to the protection of the environment have been announced by governments, organizations and the private sector, such as the Ocean Plastics Charter, the Global Ocean Alliance and the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People. Stockholm+50 is not intended to duplicate the discussions undertaken in the context of such initiatives or to revisit existing commitments, but rather to create the momentum and alliances that will accelerate action at the scale required to deliver on related commitments.

7. All must work urgently to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises while avoiding actions that will accelerate pollution and other unsustainable behaviours. Key habitats and ecosystems, such as forests and grasslands, continue to be consumed or damaged at very high rates for natural resource extraction. Destroying nature is destroying the web of life that supports human progress on Earth. It is time for humanity to stop undermining its own future.

## **III. The issues**

### **A. Transforming our relationship with nature**

#### **1. Halting biodiversity loss and restoring ecosystems**

8. Healthy ecosystems are essential for humanity. They provide the life support systems upon which human survival and well-being depend. The extent of current trends in biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation requires urgent action and a shift to understanding human impacts and dependencies, and the risks associated with the decline in the flow of nature’s benefits to people and economies. The gains, costs and risks associated with environmental change are distributed unequally within and among countries.

#### **2. Mitigation and adaptation to fight climate change**

9. The world is heading for a temperature rise of nearly 3°C this century – far beyond the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to a rise of well below 2°C, and preferably to no more than 1.5°C.<sup>2</sup> The footprint of current consumption behaviour is very unequal, with the top 10 per cent of income earners producing almost 50 per cent of total carbon emissions, while the bottom 50 per cent of income earners produce less than 7 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

10. Key challenges remain, such as fair and effective carbon pollution pricing, greater ambition and effectiveness in mitigation efforts that includes the deployment of environmentally sound and clean technologies, and scaled-up financial, technology transfer and capacity-building support for adaptation and mitigation action.

11. There is wide recognition that maintaining healthy ecosystems and preserving nature present opportunities for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Increased use of ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions can build resilience, reduce vulnerability and store and sequester carbon, yielding multiple benefits and supporting efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The rights

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2021: The Heat Is On: A World of Climate Promises Not Yet Delivered* (Nairobi, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2020* (Nairobi, 2020).

and views of indigenous peoples and local communities need to be factored into policies involving land interventions and land-use change. While the Glasgow Climate Pact<sup>4</sup> raises ambitions for climate adaptation, current efforts remain insufficient. Additional finance, strengthened capacities and concrete actions are needed to close the adaptation gap.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. New measures of progress toward sustainable development**

12. Governments and international institutions can implement new measures that incentivize market, economic and financial practices that foster sustainable development. In the context of such measures, the environment is recognized as the foundation of the economy, its preservation is central to development and planning, and regulations are strengthened to restore natural capital. Under approaches such as comprehensive environmental accounting, biodiversity and ecosystem services are valued as assets and are considered in addition to indicators such as GDP. Comprehensive environmental accounting, carbon accounting and considering multidimensional vulnerabilities can be used to establish innovative measures to promote sustainability in business, including through the use of incentives.

## **B. Producing and consuming sustainably and fighting pollution**

### **1. Achieving sustainable consumption and production**

13. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns are fuelling climate change and biodiversity loss, causing pervasive pollution and waste and resulting in the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of economic activity. The regenerative and restorative dimensions of sustainable consumption and production have often been overlooked in national policy frameworks and business practices, and yet they have a key role to play in reducing the pressures on ecosystems and increasing positive impacts. It is urgent to accelerate efforts to implement sustainable consumption and production of consumer goods, sustainable energy production, resource extraction and use, and efforts to make trade a force for good.

### **2. Fighting plastic and chemical pollution**

14. Plastics and chemicals are integral inputs for almost all sectors of society and bring important benefits in areas from medicine and agriculture to consumer goods, clean technologies and poverty alleviation. Their sound management is essential to avoiding risks to human health and ecosystems and substantial economic costs. A legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution would be a critical step in fighting plastic and chemical pollution.<sup>6</sup> Strengthening legal frameworks and institutional capacity – including the implementation of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management – while providing incentives for innovation and collaboration are key elements of this transition.

### **3. Sustainable food systems**

15. Food systems are a key driver of changes in land and water use, leading to biodiversity loss. Food systems are also negatively affected by biodiversity loss and climate change. Interventions to implement sustainable food production and consumption can bring multiple simultaneous benefits for human and planetary health and improve jobs and livelihoods. Governments, businesses and consumers can improve crop choices and growing methods, food distribution systems, and methods for tackling food loss and waste, all measures that can increase resilience in food supply chains. In making changes to increase the sustainability of food systems, it is essential to understand and address issues affecting indigenous and

<sup>4</sup> Decision 1/CP.26 of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, also known as the Glasgow Climate Pact (text included in the report of the session, available at [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2021\\_12\\_adv.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2021_12_adv.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Adaptation Gap Report 2021: The Gathering Storm: Adapting to Climate Change in a Post-Pandemic World* (Nairobi, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> See United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/14, “End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument” (UNEP/EA.5/Res.14).

local communities, including the fulfilment of rights, land tenure and respect for and protection of traditional knowledge.

## **C. Justice, inclusion and intergenerational equity**

### **1. Environmental and social justice, gender equality and accountability**

16. Taking synergistic action on the key issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and environmental justice will require transformative change that ensures a fundamental, system-wide reorganization in technology, the economy and society. Transformation is needed in values and paradigms, goals and principles. Resolution 48/13, recently adopted by the Human Rights Council, recognizes the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and can serve as a catalyst to enable governments, legislators, courts and citizen groups around the globe to take action to respect, protect and fulfil the right to a healthy environment for all.

17. The fulfilment of human rights, including the right to meaningful and informed participation and the achievement of gender equality, gives agency to individuals and peoples in vulnerable situations and is essential for designing fair, inclusive and effective actions to sustainably use, conserve and restore nature. Gender-responsive implementation of global climate and biodiversity goals is key to sustainable development. International human rights law and international environmental law also establish a clear accountability framework for environmental and human rights violations.

18. The justice system and anti-corruption measures related to environmental crimes are an essential part of integrated solutions to protecting biodiversity. The universal implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which articulates the human rights obligations and responsibilities of States and businesses, is a key component of the rights framework. The effective implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including through human rights due diligence, would protect the environment and those who depend on it and ensure access to justice and effective remedies when harm does occur.

### **2. A just transition to sustainable socioeconomic systems**

19. The transformation to sustainable socioeconomic systems will be disruptive and hence safety nets for workers will be needed to address social tensions and avoid the rejection or postponement of urgent action. It is critical to address the key issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in order to eliminate poverty, ensure equality and empower women. For example, funding for ecosystem-based approaches, nature-based solutions and adaptation should be tied to fair labour conditions, gender equality and the creation of decent jobs. Rethinking our economic models and institutions should advance a just transition, supporting the phase-out of harmful industries and promoting global collaboration.

### **3. Intergenerational equity**

20. The actions of those alive today are often the result of inherited systems and can themselves echo across generations, creating patterns and pathways for the future. This generation's demographic, equity and equality patterns will impact humanity's relationship with nature in the future and the rights of future generations. Intergenerational equity lies at the heart of sustainable development and will ensure that every generation acts responsibly, recognizing that they are sharing the planet with other generations, past and future.

### **4. Science, education and culture to build solidarity and collaboration**

21. Different groups in society interact with and value nature in diverse ways, which can be better reflected in policy and action. Indigenous environmental ethics and philosophy can be integrated with Western approaches throughout the entire education system.<sup>7</sup> This could build solidarity and collective action between different stakeholder groups. Providing universal access to science, education and culture and enhancing lifelong learning and training in environmental stewardship and related skills, including for

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<sup>7</sup> W. Kelbessa, "Environmental ethics and policy", 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).

women and girls, indigenous peoples and local communities, provide a long-term pathway towards the transformation of human interactions with nature while ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems.

22. If we are to enhance the biosphere's health and reduce human pressures and demands, large-scale changes will be required over the next 10 years, underpinned by unprecedented levels of fulfilment of commitments and ambitions through coordinated actions and the exercise of political will. The true value of nature must be recognized to create resilience, address inequalities and achieve prosperity, rights and dignity for all – for current and future generations.

#### **IV. Key messages and recommended urgent actions**

##### ***Message 1. A healthy planet underpins social and economic progress, well-being and resilience and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.***

(a) Urgent collective and individual action is needed to adapt to a changing environment and secure a healthy planet and prosperity for all. “Business as usual” poses severe threats to our well-being, prosperity and future. The planetary crisis is already a humanitarian crisis and requires new mechanisms to effectively address climate-induced emergencies, disasters and wars.

(b) In order to take urgent action, enabling conditions and domestic policies are required that promote holistic and integrated solutions for tackling climate change, reversing biodiversity loss and preventing pollution. Using rights-based approaches can connect socioeconomic systems with the triple planetary crisis and address intergenerational responsibility and equity.

(c) New measures of progress towards sustainable development should inform policy and decision-making to reflect the multiple dimensions of sustainable development and support holistic approaches that truly value nature.

(d) Disaster risk reduction, ecosystem restoration and effective adaptation to climate change need to be scaled up at all levels, including through integrated risk management and investments in ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions. Carbon pricing, taxation, and fossil fuel subsidy reforms can be key tools to help countries mobilize complementary climate financing to address mitigation and adaptation challenges.

(e) The scale of action needed requires that all finance, domestic and international, from public, private and philanthropic sources, be directed towards a dramatic reduction in emissions from the energy, industrial and agriculture sectors, reverse biodiversity loss, and prevent pollution. The number of countries and organizations that has fully prioritized funding directed towards the clean energy transition must increase, and doing so will enhance the contribution of the private sector. Efforts by signatories are underway to end new direct international public finance for unabated fossil fuels by the end of 2022.

##### ***Message 2. Effective and fair multilateralism enables the implementation of existing commitments.***

(a) Developing countries, including least developed countries and small island developing States, are among the most vulnerable and are disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and other disasters. There is an urgent need for the simplification and acceleration of existing procedures to provide access to financing for climate projects to enable developing and middle-income countries to face their specific challenges. Access to finance, technology and technical know-how is particularly important for the most climate-vulnerable countries and should be significantly increased beyond the current levels.

(b) Support for climate mitigation and adaptation should be provided in a balanced manner with sustainable, predictable and innovative climate finance. The commitment made by developed countries to provide \$100 billion in annual climate finance by 2020 to support developing countries has not been met and must be fulfilled urgently. Enhanced commitments for annual climate finance should build on this goal, notably through the new, collectively quantified goal for climate finance, which will be set in 2024. Concessional finance should be significantly scaled up and climate finance should not be a source of additional external debt for developing countries.

(c) Science, education, knowledge-sharing and technology transfer are crucial for effective climate action, ecosystem restoration and disaster risk reduction, and to combat pollution. Collaborative efforts should be scaled up at all levels to support awareness and institutional capacity, including on approaches such as integrated risk management, adaptation, prevention and anticipatory action.

**Message 3. Fulfilling the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment can expedite sustainable development, poverty eradication, inclusivity and gender equality. Strengthened capacity in relation to environmental rule of law enables the fulfilment of human rights.**

(a) Intergenerational equity plays an important role in rethinking environmental governance in the context of the triple planetary crisis and as a feature of environmental rule of law. Building a just and equitable world is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals.

(b) Real and meaningful participation by indigenous peoples and local communities, women and young people should be enabled at all levels of decision-making. The roles, responsibilities and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities – including their intellectual property rights – must be recognized and their knowledge harnessed, while formal and informal education frameworks should enable citizens to gain awareness of the urgency of environmental action and to make a difference in their own communities.

(c) The implementation of multilateral environmental agreements should be accelerated and the capacity of countries in the global South should be strengthened to effectively enforce environmental rule of law and develop monitoring and accountability frameworks to measure progress.

(d) Environmental crimes that drive biodiversity loss and deprive communities and governments of future revenues and development opportunities should be addressed. Enhanced and collaborative law enforcement responses can tackle environmental crime, helping to enhance livelihoods and security and restore wildlife and ecosystems.

**Message 4. Integrated and joint approaches can accelerate effective climate action, ecosystem restoration, pollution prevention and disaster risk reduction.**

(a) Coordinated action on Sustainable Development Goal 12, “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, can accelerate sustainable supply chains and improve resource efficiency, the sound management of chemicals and waste and regenerative production models. Efforts across the public and private sectors should align, incentivizing knowledge-sharing and global collaboration at an unprecedented scale.

(b) Further to the recently adopted Environment Assembly resolution 5/11 on enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production, an inclusive, multilateral, multi-stakeholder dialogue should be established on pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production, including through resource efficiency and circular economy initiatives.

(c) Efforts are needed to eliminate environmentally harmful agricultural subsidies and to promote policies for sustainable food systems. Multilateral and multi-stakeholder collaboration can facilitate access to safe, diverse, and nutritious food, while state and non-state actors invest in the transition to regenerative agriculture, which represents an economic opportunity to jointly achieve climate, biodiversity and pollution goals.

(d) Efforts are also needed to accelerate sustainable production and consumption through amplifying norms of sufficiency, switching from selling goods to selling functions, setting stronger sustainability standards, and promoting policies and investments in decent jobs and knowledge-sharing to efforts to “repair, reuse and recycle”.