

# Media Update

5 June 2022

## UNITED Nations

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

### THE SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 5 June 2022

The theme of this year's World Environment Day, "Only One Earth", is a simple statement of fact. This planet is our only home. It is vital we safeguard the health of its atmosphere, the richness and diversity of life on Earth, its ecosystems and its finite resources. But we are failing to do so. We are asking too much of our planet to maintain ways life that are unsustainable. Earth's natural systems cannot keep up with our demands.

This not only hurts the Earth, but us too. A healthy environment is essential for all people and all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It provides food, clean water, medicines, climate regulation and protection from extreme weather events. It is essential that we wisely manage nature and ensure equitable access to its services, especially for the most vulnerable people and communities.

More than 3 billion people are affected by degraded ecosystems. Pollution is responsible for some 9 million premature deaths each year. More than 1 million plant and animal species risk extinction, many within decades.

Close to half of humanity is already in the climate danger zone – 15 times more likely to die from climate impacts such as extreme heat, floods and drought. There is a 50:50 chance that annual average global temperatures will breach

the Paris Agreement limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next five years. More than 200 million people each year could be displaced by climate disruption by 2050.

Fifty years ago, the world's leaders came together at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and committed to protecting the planet. But we are far from succeeding. We can no longer ignore the alarm bells that ring louder every day.

The recent Stockholm+50 environment meeting reiterated that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals rely on a healthy planet. We must all take responsibility to avert the catastrophe being wrought by the triple crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

Governments need urgently to prioritize climate action and environmental protection through policy decisions that promote sustainable progress. To that end, I have proposed five concrete recommendations to dramatically speed up the deployment of renewable energy everywhere, including making renewable technologies and raw materials available to all, cutting red tape, shifting subsidies and tripling investment.

Businesses need to put sustainability at the heart of their decision-making for the sake of humanity and their own bottom line. A healthy planet is the backbone of nearly every industry on Earth.

And as voters and consumers we must make our actions count: from the policies we support, to the food we eat, to the transport we choose, to the companies we support. We can all make environmentally friendly choices that will add up to the change we need.

Women and girls, in particular, can be forceful agents of change. They must be empowered and included in decision-making at all levels. Likewise, indigenous and traditional knowledge must also be respected and harnessed to help protect our fragile ecosystems.

History has shown what can be achieved when we work together and put the planet first. In the 1980s, when scientists warned about a deadly continent-sized hole in the ozone layer, every country committed to the Montreal Protocol to phase out ozone-depleting chemicals.

In the 1990s, the Basel Convention outlawed the dumping of toxic waste in developing countries. And, last year, a multilateral effort ended the production of leaded petrol – a move that will promote better health and prevent more than 1.2 million premature deaths each year.

This year and the next will present more opportunities for the global community to demonstrate the power of multilateralism to tackle our intertwined environmental crises, from negotiations on a new global biodiversity framework to reverse nature loss by 2030 to the establishment of a treaty to tackle plastics pollution.

The United Nations is committed to leading these cooperative global efforts, because the only way forward is to work with nature, not against it. Together we can ensure that our planet not only survives, but thrives, because we have Only One Earth.