

Interactive Dialogue 1: Addressing Marine Pollution

MONDAY 27 June 2022

3:00PM-6:00 PM

Speaking points for Ms. Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division, UN Environment Programme, Nairobi

Opening Remarks (10 minutes)

Excellencies, friends – what a pleasure to be with you here today to participate in this crucial dialogue, at this critical time.

On our blue planet, the ocean, connects us all – we know that our ocean is in trouble, which means we are in trouble.

- Trouble that we are diving ourselves deeper into if we keep driving the triple planetary crisis. The crisis of climate change. The crisis of nature and biodiversity loss. The crisis of pollution and waste.
- The effects of our unsustainable consumption patterns are all too clear – over 500 ocean dead-zones from the discharge of untreated wastewater and fertilizer run-off into our water systems. This destruction reinforced by the approximately 11 million metric tonnes of plastic flowing into marine ecosystems each year.

This year, however, even amidst so much global turmoil and a pandemic, the international community demonstrated the will to act with the determination and solidarity needed to halt the triple planetary crisis.

- Stockholm+50 showed that the world is ready for system-wide transformations that place human well-being at the centre of a healthy planet.
- Here at the UN Oceans Conference and beyond, we must tap into the Nairobi spirit we saw at the fifth UN Environment Assembly and get on with creating a better, sustainable future for our blue world.
- We have the knowledge, know-how and political momentum to change the trajectory.
- In 1972, the first Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment devoted nine out of its 109 paragraphs to marine issues in its Plan of Action.
- In 1974, a Regional Seas Programme was established to support cooperation for clean and healthy seas.
- Today, involving 146 countries and 18 regional seas conventions and action plans, this programme is one of the most comprehensive initiatives for the protection of the marine and coastal environment.
- 21 legally binding agreements relating to marine pollution have been adopted.
- Regional Seas Programme now stands to play a vital role in actively engaging and collaborating with the Convention on Biological Diversity and Division for Ocean Affairs and

the Law of the Sea towards finalization and adoption of the post 2020 global biodiversity framework – which if backed by finance to realize the vision – can revitalize ocean health.

UNEA 5.2 ushered in key resolutions, sustainable nitrogen management; sustainable lake management, a universal definition on nature-based solutions, and sound management of chemicals and waste.

- Resolutions on the circular economy reinforced plans to make infrastructure resilient, to push for a greener recovery from COVID-19 and to deal with the environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.
- The resolution supporting the establishment of a science-policy panel on the sound management of chemicals and waste will be a game-changer – providing an occasion to address environmental concerns related to pollution, which would not be limited to plastics.
- Resolution 5/2, on sustainable nitrogen management, intends to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste from all sources, including agricultural practices.
- The aspiration to halve nitrogen waste by 2030 offers a \$100 billion opportunity to mobilize innovation for the nitrogen circular economy, while contributing to environment, health and livelihoods.
- And, of course, we had a milestone moment –

The mandate given by resolution 5/14 to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment – by 2024 – offers an opportunity to transition to a new safe circular paradigm – and an opportunity for businesses to come up with alternatives and innovate across the plastics value chain.

- This process is happening in record time, with the ad-hoc Open Ended Working Group meeting having just discussed the preparations for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in Dakar, Senegal.
- So what are the critical elements for success for the final agreement to be impactful and effective – and therefore – be able to stop plastic pollution?

Here are my five key recommendations.

One, this instrument needs to be broad but clearly defined, ambitious and inclusive

- The deal must cover the full life cycle of plastics while considering different types of polymers and plastic products.
 - o Prioritize sustainable consumption and production, including the uptake of secondary and alternative raw materials.
 - o Deploy innovative reuse models – Design products that keep the highest value when recycling plastic.
 - o Address the chemical contents in the plastics we use to avoid health risks and enable non-toxic reuse and recycling.
 - o Eliminate residual waste along the value chain and ensure that what remains is collected and managed properly.

- And to do this we need to ensure that the various players in the plastics industry roll in the right direction. And that means a system transformation.

Two, all this needs to be informed by sound science.

- The deal must rely on science to identify hotspots for action from source to sea and along the value chain – looking at the most impactful polymers, products, sectors, geographic locations and waste systems.
- Our knowledge base is rapidly expanding and science has illuminated the full scale of the plastic pollution problem, including in the ocean. It must be our guide as we fix the problem.
- Furthermore, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission of UNESCO, addresses marine pollution as one of its key challenges. This global momentum shows that there is a growing international commitment to combat pollution, including ocean pollution.
- This is the time to put our incredible advances in science and technology to deliver, together, the ocean we need for the future we want.

Three, we must realise that everyone is in the same boat but with different oars

- The deal must account for the realities and complexities of the market – hear and understand the voices of plastic-dependent industries and grassroots communities, including waste pickers and others.
- We will need the voices of governments, the private sector, research and development communities, indigenous peoples, the informal sector, youth, civil society organizations and consumer-based organizations.
- We will need everyone to land this boat and implement the deal.

Four, realise that this is a massive opportunity to spur a new economy.

- It is important to remember that this is not just about ending an environmental threat, it is also about creating new economic opportunities and alleviating poverty.
- A new plastics economy means new business models, new jobs. New market opportunities for reuse and recycling. New and alternative designs, materials, and products. New services. Social and policy innovation to nudge behaviour changes in the actions of different stakeholders along the plastics life cycle.
- Let's view this as creating a bright new economy.

Five, learn from other multilateral agreements and instruments, but embrace innovations in the multilateral environmental space.

- We can learn much from, and build upon, existing instruments – from the Montreal Protocol to the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions.
- But we should also innovate. We can find new pathways for modern, inclusive and networked multilateralism to give a broader set of stakeholders a voice – and give industry a chance to commit and measure their performance or be measured against agreed targets.

Friends, we have two years to get this deal agreed and running, but the process is already in motion.

- At the open-ended working group in Dakar, progress was made on the structure of the bureau and nomination of bureau members from regions, and the first of five planned sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee is to be held in Uruguay later this year, tentatively in November.
- We are living through difficult times. But what I have seen this year – in terms of the progress on plastic pollution and nitrogen management at UNEA – in terms of the innovation and commitment from youth at yesterday’s Youth and Innovation Conference– and the growing societal movement for a healthy environment – all this reassures me that we can turn things around.

UNEP was, and remains, a forerunner for ocean considerations, elevating its importance on the global agenda - from Stockholm (past and present), to Rio, to here in Lisbon, to the Decades of Restoration and Ocean Science - guided by a strong evidence-base and technical expertise – and through catalytic partnerships and support to country commitments under the UNEA process.

Our ocean is the blue that connects us all – the origin and nexus of all life on earth – uniting every continent and every individual on this planet – UNEP looks forward to joining hands to work with all of you to protecting and restoring our blue planet.