



**President of the ECOSOC Statement at the Virtual Plenary of the 5th session of
UNEA
22 February 2021

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a privilege, to speak at the opening of the 5th session of the Environment Assembly. It was a hospitable and bio-diverse planet which accommodated the emergence and evolution of the human species; providing nutrition, food, clean air, fresh water, rich oceans, natural medicines and bountiful raw materials. It allowed humankind to survive, grow, prosper and build great civilizations. Our great prophets and holy books prescribed not only respect for each other but also respect for nature and its bounties. Unfortunately, in the Industrial Era, we have severely abused nature.

Excellencies, in the past 50 years the world's population has doubled, the global economy has grown nearly four-fold and global trade has increased ten-fold- driving up the demand for energy and raw materials. Many types of pollution are increasing with negative impacts for nature. 75 percent of the planet's land surface has been significantly altered, over a third of our forests have disappeared, 60 percent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, half the live coral cover on reefs has disappeared since the 1870s and over 85 percent of wetlands have been lost. Humans have assaulted nature and as the Secretary General of the United Nations has stated and I quote "nature is fighting back" unquote. The impact of global warming and climate change are visible and the impacts of biodiversity loss, though less visible will be equally devastating for the future of humanity. The Covid-19 pandemic is a grim reminder of the relationship between people and nature. Biodiversity loss has increased the risk of zoonotic diseases. If the bees become extinct, agricultural production would be devastating. Once despoiled, our rivers and oceans will no longer yield their natural bounties. If our forests disappear, and carbon emissions are unabsorbed, masks and social distancing may become a permanent feature of our existence.



Excellencies, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are integrated and integral. If the environmental goals are not achieved most of the other goals will also fail to be realized by 2030. It is high time to discard the economic models that are driving states to fight nature and each other. It is time to transition to a new economic and social paradigm, which values the preservation of nature, as much if not more, than gross national product in per capita incomes which enshrines sustainability as an integral part of the development paradigm. I hope that implementation of the Environmental Targets will become an integral part of the national SDG strategies of all countries and be fully reflected in their Voluntary National Reviews in the Economic and Social Council. We will also endeavor in ECOSOC Development Cooperation Forum to align the UN's Development System more closely with the sustainability targets, and in the Youth Forum this year we shall try to mobilize the energy of young people to serve their future by fighting for nature rather than against it.

Excellencies, three areas of focus I have identified for ECOSOC this year. Finance, sustainable infrastructure and science and technology are vital to achieve environmental goals. Developing countries need an estimated 4.3 trillion dollars to recover from the Covid crisis and achieve the SDG targets. There will be no recovery much less a green recovery without access to adequate finance. The promise of a 100 billion dollars annually in climate finance must be fulfilled, investment in sustainable infrastructure will impact on 92 percent of the SDG targets, this will form the heart of the transition to a green economy. The developing countries need 1.5 trillion in sustainable infrastructure investment and science and technology offers answers to the challenge of recovery from the pandemic and realization of the SDGs and Climate and Environmental Goals. The rapid production of the vaccine has affirmed the ability of innovation where the requirements of science is clearly identified. We must, clearly identify the scientific breakthroughs needed to achieve the SDGs and deploy the financial and human capital needed to make those breakthroughs. We must also, marshal the power of digitalization to accelerate equitable and green growth.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the world is at a critical inflection point; the choice is massive suffering and impending economic and environmental catastrophe or



ECOSOC | Economic
and Social
Council

75

sustainable and equitable global approach. We must mobilize the political will to take critical decisions, to end the rape of nature, to contain economic greed, to reverse policy negligence and to prevent humanity from destroying the hospitality of our planet.

I thank you.