

Stockholm+50: A Healthy Planet for the Prosperity of All – Our Responsibility, Our Opportunity

Concept Note

The Mandate – Stockholm+50 International Meeting

The United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 75/280¹ of 24 May 2021, decided to convene an international meeting in Stockholm on 2 and 3 June 2022, to commemorate 50 years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The General Assembly agreed on the theme of the international meeting “*Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity*”, and decided to organize collaborative and multi-stakeholder discussions around the following leadership dialogues:

- Leadership dialogue 1: Reflecting on the urgent need for actions to achieve a healthy planet and prosperity of all.
- Leadership dialogue 2: Achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).
- 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.

These dialogues are expected to contribute to the international meeting by yielding clear and concrete recommendations for action at all levels, including through strengthened cooperation.

All relevant stakeholders – including organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, and other interested international bodies and non-governmental organizations (i.e., organizations with “an interest in the field of the environment, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples’ organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the youth, the private sector and philanthropic organizations”) are invited to contribute to the discussions of the international meeting and their preparation.

As per General Assembly resolution 75/326,² the international meeting will include an opening segment, four plenary meetings, three leadership dialogues, and a closing segment. A preparatory meeting will be held on 28 March 2022 in New York. As requested by the resolution, the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the first special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have provided inputs into the international meeting³. In the spirit of resolution 75/326, the meeting and its preparatory phase are framed around three organizing principles of engagement: **intergenerational responsibility, inclusive participation and interconnections, and implementation opportunities.**

The Thematic focus – a healthy planet for the prosperity of all

The Stockholm Declaration adopted on 16 June 1972 by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was **the first document to recognize the interconnections between development, poverty, and the environment.**⁴ Fifty years after Stockholm, with increasing environmental challenges and growing

¹ 75/280. International meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/280>

² 75/326. Modalities for the international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/326>

³ UNEP/EA.5/HLS.1

⁴ The Stockholm Declaration (UN Conference on the Human Environment, Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, New York (1973), <http://www.un-documents.net/aconf48-14r1.pdf>) alerted us to the need of acting wisely to protect the planet: “We have reached a moment in history in which we must guide our actions around the world, paying more attention to the consequences that they may

inequality affecting development and wellbeing, the global community comes together to reflect on the urgent need for actions to address these interconnections. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, plastic waste, nitrogen overload, anti-microbial resistance, and rising toxicity through reduced and altered ecosystem goods and services are unprecedented challenges for humanity. By negatively impacting health, eroding capabilities, and limiting present and future development opportunities, these challenges are increasing human insecurity.⁵ Inequality and imbalance is also evident in the use of natural resources, where economic benefits and environmental and social burdens are asymmetrically distributed across countries and regions.⁶ Adjusted for planetary pressures, few if any countries can deliver on high levels of human wellbeing in a way compatible with sustainable development.⁷ During 1990-2014, for example, produced capital grew at an average annual rate of 3.8 per cent, while health- and education-induced human capital grew at 2.1 per cent. Meanwhile, natural capital decreased at an annual rate of 0.7 per cent.⁸

The 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 crisis have centre-staged the relationship of human progress and prosperity to a healthy environment. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented economic and social stresses. In 2020, there was a sharp reduction across all the three dimensions of the Human Development Index (HDI): health, knowledge and living standards. The crisis continued in 2021, with human development levels (as measured by the COVID-19-adjusted HDI) remaining well below pre-COVID-19 levels.⁹ Global debt has surged, and countries face several financial and long-term economic risks if this is not addressed.¹⁰ In the 1980s and 1990s, the general understanding was one of economy, society and environment being three legs of society's stool. Today, however, it is clear that, without tackling the planetary crises, human actions will pull the proverbial rug out from under both society's and economy's feet, which will result in further distress and insecurity. This insight has sharpened with the lived experience of COVID-19, during which society has learned that an invisible virus can pull that same rug, and thereby halt economic progress, plunge millions into poverty, impact societal stability and expose poor and emerging economies to high levels of personal and sovereign debt. Planetary and other threats are all leading to a systemic crisis of human development and growing human insecurity – a crisis of food insecurity, displacement, joblessness, inequality and conflict.¹¹

Science points to the urgent need for a **system-wide transformation of socioeconomic systems** through policies, that change economic and social signalling, such as measures of progress and wellbeing, true costs of economic products, targeted pro-poor subsidies, sustainable consumption that addresses both under and over

have for the environment. Through ignorance or indifference, we can cause immense and irreparable damage to the earthly environment on which our lives and wellbeing depend.”

⁵Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018): Summary for Policymakers, Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report.

https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/SR15_SPM_version_report_LR.pdf; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services., [SR15_SPM_version_report_LR.pdf \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6).

UNEP (2019): Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People, <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>.

UNEP (2019): Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions, <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions>.

Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General (2019): Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development,

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf.

International Resource Panel (2019): Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want, <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/global-resources-outlook>.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2021): Anthropocene (In)Securities – Reflections on Collective Survival 50 Years After the Stockholm Conference, E Lövbrand and M Mobjörk (eds.), SIPRI Research Report No. 26, Oxford, 2021,

https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/anthropocene_insecurities.pdf.

⁶ IRP (2019): Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want, <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/global-resources-outlook>.

⁷ UNDP (2020): The Human Development Report, The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>;

⁸ UNDP (2020): The Human Development Report, The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>;

⁸ UNEP (2018): Inclusive Wealth Report 2018, <https://www.unep.org/resources/inclusive-wealth-report-2018>.

⁹United Nations Development Programme (2022). New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity,

<https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/srhs2022.pdf>.

¹⁰ World Bank (2022). World Development Report 2022 - Finance for an equitable recovery,

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36883/9781464817304.pdf>.

¹¹ UNDP (2022): New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: demanding greater solidarity. Special report United Nations Development Programme (2022). New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity,

<https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/srhs2022.pdf>.

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consumption, circular production practices, investment in education, gender equality and rights of women.¹² Policies are required to enable countries to increase fiscal space, invest in sustainable infrastructure, rebuild key sectors and value chains, grow green and decent jobs, and align finance and investment in the pandemic recovery with longer term sustainable and equitable development.

Today, humankind has a choice: we can continue down the path of the last 50 years – characterized by unbalanced growth, unequal wealth, and unsustainable consumption and production resulting in a degrading planet and growing inequity, ill-health, mistrust, and hopelessness for the many and a good life for the few – or we can collectively pause and move forward with empathy and solidarity, anticipation, and foresight towards collective action for better futures. **Building on the outcomes of all the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields** – especially the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development¹³, Agenda 21¹⁴, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development¹⁵ and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation), and the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”,¹⁶ – **Stockholm+50 provides us with an opportunity for a collective pause.** While it is a **commemoration** of the 1972 Conference, it is also a **reflection** on the interconnectedness of the health of the planet, equity and collective wellbeing. It is an **opportunity** to provoke a collective shift in our reflection by expanding the community of thinkers and voices. It is a **recommitment to the notion of responsibility** embedded in the 1972 declaration and documents. Most importantly, however, it is a **call to accelerate the implementation of commitments** in the context of the Decade of Action and the delivery of sustainable development – including a sustainable, equitable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Expectation – Our Responsibility, Our Opportunity to ensure continued prosperity for all

As countries strive to recover and reset from the pandemic and global lockdown, Stockholm+50 provides a fourfold opportunity to: a.) **rebuild relationships of trust** for strengthened cooperation and solidarity (including by reimagining our futures together through engagement, knowledge sharing and learning¹⁷); b.) **accelerate system wide actions** needed to recover and build forward from the pandemic (including through innovative finance for an equitable recovery,¹⁸ mechanisms to address debt through collective action, and creating fiscal spaces to support just transition pathways to a low carbon, circular, nature positive and resilient development);

¹²See the various reports that make the case: Emissions Gap Reports; IRP (2019): Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want, <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/global-resources-outlook>; UNEP (2019): Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People, <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>; IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, [SR15 SPM version report_LR.pdf \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions); UNEP (2019): Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions, <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions>; Dasgupta, P. (2021), The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (London: HM Treasury). UNEP (2021): Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies, <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>. See also Baste and Watson (2022). Tackling the climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies by making peace with nature 50 years after the Stockholm Conference. Global Environmental Change (73), 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378022000048>; World Bank. 2012. World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4391> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO; UNDP (2020) *op.cit.*; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2021). Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development. UN DESA/POP/2021/TR/NO. 2.

¹³ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, annex II

¹⁵ Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August–4 September 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

¹⁶ Resolution 66/288, annex

¹⁷ UNESCO (2021): Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, a report by the International Commission on the Futures of Education, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>.

¹⁸ World Bank (2022). World Development Report 2022 - Finance for an equitable recovery, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36883/9781464817304.pdf>.

c.) **connect and build bridges across agendas** (drawing together the commitments from the global processes of 2021 and 2022¹⁹ to strengthen the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development); and d.) **rethink conceptions and measures of progress and wellbeing** to provide a new compass of collective welfare.

Additionally, the meeting offers an opportunity to explore emerging areas in support of a healthy planet. Possible examples include making universal the recently recognized human right to a **clean, healthy and sustainable environment**,²⁰ rights of **nature**, exploration of **alternative knowledge systems**,²¹ adoption of a wider **“One Health”** approach to address issues around the human-animal-ecosystem health interface, and recognition of the need to learn from other cultures and paradigms to protect, reciprocate and live in solidarity. As the UN Secretary-General has pointed out, **“humanity’s welfare – and indeed, humanity’s very future – depend on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals”**.²²

Stockholm+50 opens the way for accelerating actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda and beyond to a 50-year timeframe. It will complement the important spaces that have been created for discussing and resolving the climate, nature and pollution challenges posed to development and health. Its central value added goes beyond aggregating the insights and decisions from these political processes. Stockholm+50 represents a chance to think and act beyond the silos of individual challenges towards a systemic approach – one that builds on existing initiatives and agreements and takes them one step forward (recognizing the different capacities and circumstances of nations). It offers an opportunity to mark a milestone on how we conceive and deliver on human well-being, capabilities, and freedoms by focusing on the needs of humankind in the 21st century.

The overarching focus of the Leadership Dialogues will be on the implementation of tangible, value-added **actions and deliverables** toward a healthy planet, a sustainable and equitable recovery, and achieving the 2030 Agenda. Intended for governments and non-state actors, they will aim to reduce gender, income-based and other forms of inequalities and especially benefit poor and vulnerable groups. The Dialogues are expected to establish the timeframe for ambition beyond the 2030 Agenda, and, through this lens, **identify the most urgent actions** to put the world on a pathway to realize longer-term ambitions. They will also aim to **align Stockholm+50 and the Decade of Action** with ongoing discussions to **steward and address the health of the planet**. Through its engagement, children and youth can provide a “contemporary” interpretation and commitment to these principles and, in turn, the outcomes of Stockholm+50 can be framed as a “promise” to future generations.

The Leadership Dialogues will also inform follow-up activities in the wake of the international meeting, including the possible launch of legacy initiatives designed to assist countries in accelerating progress on sustainable development priorities that contribute to a healthy planet for the prosperity for all. **Summaries of the Leadership Dialogues will be included in the report of the international meeting.**

Our generation has inherited an Earth that is rich with possibilities. Never before has knowledge and technology opened so many possibilities to so many – delivering innovations and progress unimaginable to previous generations. Yet, with these opportunities comes increased responsibility – responsibility to **care for the Earth** that sustains life and to **ensure that prosperity reaches and is shared by all**. **The next fifty years will be crucial for finding that balance.** Solidarity and collective actions are essential for success, and the recommendations and messages that emerge from Stockholm+50 have an opportunity to mark a historic milestone on the journey.

¹⁹ On food, energy, climate, biodiversity, chemicals, pollution, oceans, reforestation, and financing.

²⁰ Human Rights Council resolution 48/13, *The human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment*, A/HRC/37/59 A/HRC/48/L.23/Rev.1 (as orally revised) (8 October 2021), available from <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/13>.

²¹ Recalling the World Heritage Convention of 1972, also a child of Stockholm: UNESCO (2002): *The Budapest Declaration on World Heritage*, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/1334>.

²² UN Secretary General (2021): *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General*, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.