

Women's Major Group @ UNEA

Comments on Draft Ministerial Declaration of the 2019 United Nations Environment Assembly

“Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production”

Submitted January 31st, 2019

1. We, the world's Ministers of the Environment, having gathered at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, together with the representatives of international organizations and stakeholders, are dedicated to moving towards sustainable, prosperous and inclusive societies with sustainable consumption and production patterns that prevent and address environmental challenges with **just, inclusive** and innovative solutions.

2. We reaffirm that poverty eradication, gender **equality**, changing unsustainable and promoting **reduced consumption and production as well as** sustainable patterns of ~~consumption and production~~, including the circular economy, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development and we recognize that **creative approaches and innovative human rights-based, gender-responsive and social-inclusive** solutions can move our world closer to the vision set out in “The future we want” and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

3. We are, however, deeply concerned about the findings of the latest global environmental assessments which indicate, that our Planet is increasingly polluted, rapidly warming and quickly losing its biodiversity, and about the widespread unsustainable use of our natural resources. **We note with regret that the voluntary commitments by industry and government have not managed to halt this negative trend. Only mandatory phase out policies have shown positive effects. We therefore agree to focus on binding agreements for the urgent protection of our planet.**

4. We are determined to ambitiously scale-up our efforts to overcome common environmental and health challenges through fostering sustainable and efficient resource management; ensuring the access and use of environmental data; engaging **NGOs/ CSOs, citizens at large including women, youth, older persons, indigenous peoples**, civil society, ~~citizens~~, the private sector and academia; and therefore, agree to take the following actions:

(a) We will improve national resource management strategies with an integrated life-cycle approach to protect human health and the environment from harmful effects of chemicals, pollution and waste, and to achieve a resource-efficient and circular economy, **ensuring that we will not promote the recycling of toxic substances but instead their fast phase out;**

(b) We will ~~foster opportunities for the~~ **ensure rapid phase out and innovative** ~~mandatory~~ substitution of hazardous substances in material cycles with the aim of achieving safe and non-toxic material flows **which we had committed to achieve by 2020 under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).**

Comment: *The WMG is concerned about the fact that this language proposed is going back 25 years in time since there is already a 2020 target to phase out harmful toxic chemicals in consumer products under SAICM (1996). We call for an urgent phase out and 'mandatory substitution' of harmful chemicals as committed in 2002 at the WSSD in Johannesburg, and call UNEP not to 'step on its toes', and acknowledge previously agreed policy frameworks as well as Resolutions from past UNEAs.*

(c) We will promote **healthy and** sustainable food systems by implementing **agroecological** practices, supporting the development, introduction **and promotion** of plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy, improving value generation **for the most vulnerable producers** and addressing food security, environmental health and human well-being in an integrated manner;

Comment: *The WMG believes that, in this respect, it is important to acknowledge the need to bring in fiscal incentives and disincentives (including the "polluter pays principle"). We call governments to:*

- *Establish fiscal incentives and disincentives to guide industry towards sustainable production patterns, particularly targeting the mining, extraction, industrial farming, transportation, and energy generation industries.*

Most important of these are:

- o Removal of subsidies from unsustainable and polluting production;*
- o Disincentives/penalties applied to unsustainable/polluting production including to those industries that harm people's health and ignore animal welfare aspects;*
- o Incentives to support sustainable, ecological alternatives.*

**See example of [How support for the livestock sector in the EU and Mercosur countries is subsidising forest destruction](#)*

We emphasize in the need for dietary change in light of the disproportionate impact of unsustainable livestock production on forests.

(d) We will implement sustainable land, **water** and soil management measures, including ~~afforestation~~, **forests**, wetland and landscape restoration; work to prevent and restore, to combat desertification, deforestation, soil pollution, biodiversity loss and to stem climate change, and work on mitigation and adaptation;

Comment: *The WMG calls governments to recognize the need for preventative actions (not just measures), and that appropriate binding regulation and enforcement in place, could help prevent future damages. Likewise, we believe it is necessary to define and entrench corporate responsibilities, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and look towards the Global Pact for the Environment. We would like to remind Parties of the importance of promoting community forest governance within the framework of the voluntary guidelines on responsible land tenure, taking into account the role and rights of women.*

(e) We will share knowledge on policies, practices, and the best available techniques for the sustainable management of metal and mineral resources and we will enhance national policies;

Comment: *The WMG believes that recycling targets must be established and that moratoriums on new mining sites must be issued.*

(f) We commit to harmonise international environmental data standards and we support the development of a global environmental data strategy by 2025, under the auspices of relevant United Nations bodies;

(g) We will improve environmental monitoring systems, **using the planetary boundaries framework**, including air and water quality, deforestation, marine litter, and environmental security, and we support the development of national environmental data management capacities; we will also promote the use of data analysis models to support evidence-based decision making at all levels and work towards ensuring transparency of and open access to environmental data, **which should be disaggregated by gender, age, location and include other variables (in line with SDG 17.18)**

(h) We will work towards defining appropriate and ambitious national **and thus local** targets for reducing waste generation, ~~increasing~~, reimagining, and reinventing wasteful products, ~~the reuse of products, and recycling of waste~~ by 2025;

Comment: *The WMG believes that the approach to waste must not only depend on increasing reuse and recycling; a coherent approach such integrate aspects that include all stages of production, marketing and re-thinking (over)consumption.*

(i) We will decisively address the damage to our ecosystems caused by the unsustainable use and disposal of single-use plastic products, including by phasing-out most problematic single-use plastic products as early as 2025, and we ~~account~~ ~~encourage~~ the private sector to find affordable and eco-friendly alternatives, **while following the 'polluters-pay framework'**

(j) We will support the efforts to develop **binding** global products sustainability and circularity criteria ~~by 2025~~ by **2021** and we agree to set ambitious national targets on the use of sustainable public procurements to stimulate demand for environmentally sound products, processes and services;

Comment: *The WMG believes that governments should ensure that they introduce public procurement policies and practices which do least harm and most good – in terms of moving to humane, sustainable and environmental solutions. This is in government hands and as such, it should be acknowledged and public procurement targets strengthened.*

(k) We encourage the disclosure of product information to consumers and communities and we will promote the development of solutions, with special emphasis on digital solutions, to increase transparency in product chains, **guided by agreements like the Aarhus convention, REACH, Escazú Agreement**

(l) We will invest in environmental education in the framework of sustainable development with a strong gender focus and promote a wider use of innovative approaches, such as inclusive citizen science and social innovation programmes, using methods that ensure that this imparts a “solutions-based approach”, and a spirit of respect and reverence for nature and animals;

Comment: *We believe on the need to ensure that education includes both environment and sustainability, and wider values that are needed to build relevant attitudes and approaches (critical and creative thinking, values that respect nature, animals and other people, a sense of personal responsibility and solution-orientation, among others). Impacts of consumption/production must be included and clearly visualized including by holding accountable those who have been involved in creating them.*

(m) We will promote and incentivize new eco-innovative business models and we will advocate the wider application of indigenous **people's** traditional knowledge (TK) including **women's TK**, environmentally friendly practices for more sustainable economies and resilient societies;

(n) We will accelerate sustainable and **accessible** ~~innovative~~ financing opportunities and solutions for women and other marginalized groups, and we will build ~~innovative~~ **fair and equitable** partnerships to unlock new capital for sustainable investments;

Comment: *We believe financing does not need to be innovative; it needs to be accessible to women and other vulnerable peoples and not continue 'business as usual' by giving power to the polluters; what is urgently needed, is innovative methods to ensure direct access to finance for women, youth and indigenous peoples and local communities and their organizations.*

(o) We will improve good practices of engagement to ensure the meaningful involvement of civil society, citizens, ~~private sector~~ and academia in the policy making process, **while preventing conflict of interests with the private sector.**

5. We agree that the effective implementation of these actions requires enabling policy frameworks at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, and effective means of implementation including finance, capacity-building, ~~mutually beneficial partnerships~~ **based on clear procedures to avoid conflict of interests** ~~and the development~~, as mutually agreed in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda

Comment: *The WMG believes that engagement with the private sector should be based on transparency and accountability principles. We fear that conflict of interest may arise regularly threatening the transition to real solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.*

6. We underscore the crucial role of overarching and binding policy frameworks and the importance of coherent and robust approach to follow-up processes and we commit to develop ambitious post-2020 global frameworks for biodiversity, in this regard we welcome the outcomes of the UN Biodiversity Conference in Sharm El-Sheikh in 2018, and for the sound management of chemicals and waste with a corresponding approach to be considered at the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly;

Comment: *The WMG calls for stronger synergies between existing conventions, agreements and treaties, etc. and the articulation of work between the different institutions/agencies in a way that these synergize leverage the potential of the objectives proposed and not clash among them. We urge countries to become Party to and implement international treaties like the Rio conventions and the Fresh Water conventions to enhance cooperation and synergies, but also the CEDAW / Beijing pA, children treaty etc. that give clear guidance on the importance of sound environmental and natural resource management to benefit all.*

7. We invite the Executive Director to provide a progress report through the regular United Nations environmental assessment processes, including the Global Environment Outlook, the Global Chemicals Outlook and the Global Resource Outlook, to track the implementation of this Declaration, at the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

i United Nations Environment Programme (2019) Global Environmental Outlook 6; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2018) Summaries for Policy Makers of the Assessment Reports for Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, Africa, Europe and Central Asia and thematic Assessment on Land degradation and restoration <https://www.ipbes.net/event/ipbes-6-plenary>; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2017) Global Land Outlook <https://www.unccd.int/actions/global-land-outlook-glo>; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019) Special Report on Global warming of 1.5oC <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/> ; International Energy Agency (2018) World Energy Outlook 2018 <https://webstore.iea.org/world-energy-outlook-2018> ; Food and Agriculture Organization (2018) The State of Food and Agriculture 2018 <http://www.fao.org/publications/highlights-detail/en/c/1157519/>; IRP (2017) Assessing global resource use: A systems approach to resource efficiency and pollution reduction <http://resourcepanel.org/reports/assessing-global-resource-use> ; United Nations Environment Programme (2017) Towards a Pollution Free Planet <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/node/41653> [These citations will be removed in the final document unless otherwise agreed].