

7 August 2017

“Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”

Comments on the Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly

The World Future Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”. We welcome the fact that the drafting of the ministerial outcome document is a transparent and inclusive process and we hope that this will continue.

We would like to use our opportunity for comment to emphasise a number of points that the Ministerial Outcome Document should include if UNEA3 is to offer steps “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”. Many of our comments repeat those made by the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL).

1. Emphasising the human right to a clean and healthy environment. The draft outcome document rightfully recognises that combatting pollution and its impacts on communities is not only an environmental challenge but also an imperative to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights (see the Stockholm Declaration, principle 1). We urge UN Environment to maintain this reference to the linkages between the realisation of the human right to a clean and healthy environment and efforts to eliminate pollution.
2. Emphasising in particular the right of every child to a clean and healthy environment. Recognising that environmental pollution will impinge upon a child’s development and their health, often into adulthood, bringing significant long term damages on a broad scale to our societies, communities and economies.
3. Recognising that over 400,000 early deaths are caused each year by air pollution in Europe alone. The most vulnerable, especially children and older people, are most affected. Many national air quality plans are simply inadequate, and there is little urgency amongst many governments to take action to reduce air pollution levels to within legal levels.
4. Reaffirming the priority given to the promotion and protection of procedural rights in order to ensure fully informed decision making. The language related to information availability and to the genuine and meaningful participation of the public to decision-making in the outcome document must be strengthened to reflect that these elements constitute rights for all citizens. Additionally, the outcome document should include a reference to the importance of providing individual whose rights have been infringed in the context of pollution with adequate access to judicial remedies. The effective enjoyment of these three procedural rights, and in particular for

the groups most exposed to pollution, is a guarantee that communities are empowered and can actively contribute to tackling the sources and impacts of pollution.

5. Building on the precautionary principle. The outcome document must reiterate the recognition by the international community of the central role that the precautionary principle must play when addressing the threats posed by pollution to the environment and to human health (Rio Declaration, principle 15). Accordingly, the outcome document must exclude any language suggesting that action to prevent, reduce and control pollutant must be dependant on scientific certainty.
6. Prioritising the protection of those most exposed to pollutants. The outcome document must acknowledge that pollution has a greater impact on specific populations and groups who are more exposed to chemicals, pesticides, wastes and other forms of pollution. The outcome document should therefore call for specific actions to guarantee the rights of these groups. It shall require that states ensure a high level of protection [and remedy] from any source of pollution, especially taking into account the role of women, workers and their families, the poor, children, the elderly, and indigenous people and their communities, respecting principles 20 and 22 of the Rio declaration.
7. Highlighting synergies with relevant international frameworks. We believe that the outcome document could be strengthened by an explicit reference of the synergies between the elimination of pollution and other existing international frameworks and commitments such as many of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. Acknowledgement of these synergies could strengthen the case that the objective set by this outcome document would reinforce other existing engagement of the international communities and that it should be implemented in a manner that is coherent to these existing frameworks.

We look forward to future opportunities to comment.

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