

**"Moment for Nature" High-level Thematic Debate**

***20 July 2022***

**Remarks by H.E. Abdulla Shahid President of the UN General Assembly**

Thank you for joining this ‘Moment for Nature’.

Convening today’s high-level thematic debate was a pledge that I had made during my campaign for President, through my vision statement.

And I am pleased to have been able to honor that pledge today.

I have convened today’s debate to discuss the synergies between the various environmental work streams that have run throughout the 76th session.

Work streams covering the three COPs on Climate, Desertification and Biodiversity, the UN conferences on the Ocean, sustainable transportation, food systems, and energy, and the UN Environment Assembly, UNEP@50, as well as Stockholm +50.

Rarely has a UN session witnessed this kind of focus on the climate and the environment. Indeed this is a super session on nature.

While I could list off facts and figures about the damages we have caused to our environment, drawing upon the findings from all the various conferences and summits held this year, there would be little point.

We have heard this, time and again.

We know the situation is dire.

I’ve seen this in my own country, the Maldives. Just recently, over one-third of inhabited islands were affected by sea swells – unexpected at this time of the year, affecting lives, livelihoods, agriculture, the soil, and people’s homes.  Just imagine, when the sea rushes in to the island, without warning, and with nowhere to run.

We know that we have backed ourselves into a corner with our recklessness.

We know that this will only get worse, and quickly, as we continue to delay the actions that are needed.

What I will do instead, is remind you that it is not too late, that we are still capable of turning this around.

Throughout the 76th session I have come back, time and again, to the theme of hope; hope stemming from the conviction that, despite the daunting challenges we face, our world, our species, truly does have the capacity and capabilities of changing our world.

Together, we possess the know-how and the resources to achieve sustainable transformations; transformations that can deliver us to a more resilient and bountiful world.

We see this in the technologies that, only decades ago, would have been inconceivable; that centuries ago would have been dismissed as utter fantasy.

I myself remember a time when the power of renewable energies was viewed as far too weak and expensive to make a difference.

Today, fleets of vehicles and countless homes run on renewables. Entire cities and countries aspire to be run on renewable energies. The possibilities are endless.

Today’s discussion, featuring an array of experts from all sectors and corners of society, will center entirely on solutions within our grasp.

The initiatives and partnerships highlighted are concrete proposals to overcome the technical, skilling and financing gaps standing between us and the world we dream of for our children and all future generations.

The gaps in question have been identified by the UN Environment Programme through an analysis, that my office requested, of the outcomes and commitments of the various environmental conferences.

It identifies areas that we know all too well, including political commitment, financing, and inclusivity for women and marginalized groups, as sources of common concern across all workstreams.

In this regard, we will hear from the Executive Director of UN Environment, Ms. Inger Andersen, about these common challenges.

We will also hear from civil society and UN agencies alike on what is needed, across these workstreams, to ensure a holistic approach to protect life on land and below water, and to halt climate change.

We will hear about how the recovery from COVID-19 can be capitalized upon to help address these bottlenecks; as well as how the Sustainable Development Goals – the common thread that binds all our efforts – is the blueprint for recovery we so sorely need.

We will hear from young people – in every segment and panel – about what they need to contribute to the protection of the planet they will inherit.

And we will hear from representatives of new and traditional media, who will discuss the need for, and the opportunities in, relaying these messages to the public at large.

We just heard two-time Grammy award winner Ricky Kej who is on a journey to empower and inspire change in people through the emotional language of arts and music. He did charge us all up with his motivational song “Born from the Land”.

Undertaking the type of transformational and societal change that we envision is only possible with the buy-in of our 8-billion constituents. Yet, this remains an area that we struggle in.

Engaging the peoples of the world has immense dividends.

I have seen this for myself on my travels. From Angola to Guatemala, I have seen communities in action. Communities protecting and living in harmony with the beautiful and bountiful ecosystems that they live in.This is what we must aspire to.

We have just 89 months – just 89 months to halve global emissions. Just 89 months to avoid catastrophic climate change. Just 89 months to do everything we can, to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees.

That is not a lot of time.

It is my sincere hope that the Moment for Nature will help inform discussions and strategies on coordinated environmental action, and propose solutions in high-impact areas that can truly make a difference.

The UN General Assembly has a critical role in raising awareness, fostering political consensus, galvanizing momentum, and giving strategic direction to the UN system.

As a convener of the best of humanity’s ingenuity and determination, this Assembly can facilitate partnerships among the broader global community at the scale and breadth of ambition needed, and can link this to the many other challenges we face.

Last week the world came together in awe at the wonders presented to us by the James Webb Telescope.

We saw countless galaxies home to countless stars, and tried, each of us, to grasp the incredible and unfathomable magnitude of our universe.

We were reminded of how small our planet is in the grand scheme of things, and how much we must do to protect it.

And we were reminded also of how far we have come in a relatively short while, of what we can achieve, what we can build, and what we are capable of.

While photos such as those we saw last week may let us dream of what is out there, right now, today, and for the foreseeable future, this planet is all that we have. Our existence is predicated on our ability to live and thrive here.

Knowing this, let us use our incredible ingenuity, our immense resources, and our determination to not only survive but to thrive; to ensure that our children’s children continue to reach further than we can only dream, not out of necessity, but out of curiosity.

I wish you a productive discussion.

I now invite the Assembly to hear remarks from the 4 remaining speakers of the opening:

1. H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations
2. H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council
3. H.E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN
4. Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme

And upon the completion of these remarks, the meeting will be handed over to the moderator of the first segment, Ms. Angelique Pouponneau, Deputy Fellowship Coordinator and Policy Advisor of the Alliance of Small Island States.

I thank you

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