**SUMMARY OF WEBINAR CONFERENCE**

**“Building Back Better: protecting biodiversity, combating land degradation and mitigating climate change to reduce the risks of future pandemics, and the importance of a coherent approach”**

The webinar, convened by H.E. Ms. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment of Egypt, with the support of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, was held on 10 September 2020 and was attended by over 500 participants from all parts of the world.

**Key messages**

* Cooperation across all domains and sectors of society will be critical in mobilizing action in order to reduce and prevent the risk of future pandemics. As the world “builds back”, recognition of the intrinsic connection between human health and the health and resilience of nature must serve as the basis of a global integrated approach for One Health. Therefore, it is urgent to harness ecosystem/nature-based solutions not only towards the global recovery efforts under way from COVID‑19, but also in addressing the challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. The need for effective multilateralism has never been greater or more urgent than today.
* The following actions characterizing an integrated approach were identified:

(a) Conserving and restoring ecosystems to prevent further degradation and help to reverse damage that is already done, thereby reducing the risk of emergence of zoonotic diseases;

(b) Promoting sustainable, legal and safe use of wildlife to immediately reduce the potential emergence of zoonotic diseases, while rebuilding livelihoods at local levels;

(c) Promoting sustainable and safe agriculture, including crop and livestock production and aquaculture;

(d) Promoting healthy and sustainable diets as a component of sustainable consumption;

(e) Effective articulation of how to rebuild green economies in the face of other global challenges;

(f) Mainstreaming biodiversity across all sectors.

* In order to achieve the level of transformation required to fulfil the needs and health of all peoples while protecting the planet, the political profile of biodiversity, climate change and land degradation must be elevated to the highest levels.

**Summary**

The webinar was chaired by H.E. Ms. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment of Egypt. In her opening remarks, Ms. Fouad began by noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had had major impacts on world‑wide efforts on health, environment and sustainable development, with an expected cost of $9 trillion. She emphasized the essential need for countries to place the issues of climate change, biodiversity conservation and land degradation at the heart of economic recovery strategies. She made a call for global solidarity to use ecosystem-based approaches and seek synergies between these environmental issues in order to use resources efficiently. Finally, she invited the speakers to discuss how the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, combating land degradation, and fighting climate change could help to “build back better” and reduce the risks of future pandemics, and how implementation was the key to an inclusive and comprehensive “One Health” approach.

Speakers in the opening session agreed that the global pandemic had forced humanity to re‑evaluate its relationship with nature and to recognize that “business as usual” could not continue; growth and prosperity had come at a heavy cost to nature. As the world moved forward in its recovery, fundamental shifts in thinking would be required, along with strengthened synergies among intergovernmental instruments, to establish the solid international coordination needed to tackle these global challenges.

In the first panel session, speakers highlighted the interconnection among the work programmes of the three Rio conventions and their shared goal: a green, safe and healthy world for all. They noted clear linkages, including how climate changes pushes species to the brink of extinction and accelerates land degradation. Equally, degradation of ecosystems exacerbates the level and impacts of climate change. They noted the need to build cooperation and complementarity among all actors and relevant instruments, including among multilateral environmental agreements and international organizations. Speakers also recognized the need for transformational change, from individual decisions that build new social norms to legal and policy reforms that enable the world to grow and prosper while respecting nature. The negotiation of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework based on science and sound implementation supporting transformative change would provide a basis for such shifts and represent the realization of the opportunity to “build back better”.

Speakers in the second panel session highlighted how coherent and joint implementation of the work programmes of the three Rio conventions, as well as clear articulation of the way to build green economies, was key for the “One Health” approach. They highlighted the pressure that the increased human population was exerting on the planet: unsustainable exploitation of resources and species, land degradation, food and other waste, climate change, and zoonotic diseases. It was noted that science alone was not enough to draw the necessary attention from other issues and political realities that many countries live through, especially with the social impacts of the pandemic. Speakers recognized the necessity of designing interventions and initiatives that would transform environmental actions linked to people’s livelihoods. Speakers also highlighted the urgent need to mainstream biodiversity issues across all sectors, including, in particular, the agricultural sector, and the need to understand the role of wildlife in the food chain. They emphasized the importance of the management of food systems, the need to focus on health issues linked to nature, and how global standards for ecosystem/nature-based solutions could provide a basis to benchmark progress.

In conclusion, H.E. Yasmine Fouad signalled this moment as an opportunity to demonstrate linkages and tools as the world strives to “build back better”. As she thanked the panellists for their contributions, she noted that the focus must remain on the means of implementation and how the various institutions and organizations could support that. The United Nations Summit on Biodiversity provides a unique opportunity to call for the Rio conventions to provide a green, coherent and inclusive way forward in the global economic agenda. This agenda must take into consideration youth as the future generation providing the much needed innovation and inspiration for significant change.

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