

26 May, 2020

Submission of suggestions for UNEA declaration

1) What would you, as government/organization/stakeholder, welcome as the most important elements and /or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?

Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers) proposes the following important elements/key messages for the declaration of the ministers. These can be grouped into two main focuses: 1. To regulate the activity of big corporations which are devastating natural resources and especially forested areas with impunity, and are promoting climate change; 2. To regulate and minimise the practice of large scale animal agriculture which frequently destroys the environment, fuels climate change and gives rise to infectious zoonotic diseases. These focuses tackle the root causes of many of the problems that the SDGs are trying to address (destruction of biodiversity, of livelihoods, pollution of water resources, ...).

1. To respect the rights of local communities that are closely dependent on land and forests, by taking measures to preserve forests against deforestation.
 - a. Before and through all stages of the processes of logging, mining, the production of palm oil, rubber, ..., there should be prior, informed and free consent of all the local people through written agreements to which all those affected are party.
 - b. Clear regulations for the operation of exploiting companies should be developed and publicised, ensuring that the local people receive an adequate percentage of the profits. Measures should be taken to minimise bribery and corruption and to ensure full compliance of the company with the agreement signed.
 - c. Environmental Impact Assessments should be rigorously conducted and retained as a central reference for all exploitation agreements and their implementation.
 - d. In the case of existing concessions, the State should take measures to better control the exploitation of forest resources in order to guarantee the rights of affected communities and to guarantee compensation for victims affected.
 - e. Awareness-raising programmes on the environmental and social impacts of exploitation of forest resources should be rolled out for all schools as well as for affected communities.
 - f. Since the exploitation of forest resources (one of the big contributors to the proliferation of Greenhouse gases) takes place in many of the countries most threatened by climate change, all efforts should be made by these countries to discover and develop alternative income-generating economic activities, eg sustainable tourism.

2. To regulate and minimise the practice of large-scale animal agriculture which includes the meat industry and the fishing industry:
 - a. to avoid the cruel and unsanitary conditions prevailing in many traditional markets as well as in many industrialised animal farming operations. The cramped conditions subject the animals to great stress which reduces their immune systems and accelerates the development of viruses. When they are handled, slaughtered and eaten by humans, this gives rise to the spread of infectious zoonotic diseases such as SARS, MERS, Ebola, Rift Valley fever, Nipah virus, and, probably, the novel corona virus that spawned the Covid-19 pandemic now sweeping the world.
 - b. to avoid overfishing which is bringing fish populations to the point of collapse.
 - c. to avoid animal agriculture's negative impacts on the environment including:
 - enabling significant greenhouse gas emissions which fuel climate change.
 - rainforest destruction,
 - species extinction,
 - ocean dead-zones,
 - water pollution, and
 - habitat destruction.
 - d. To divert the food grown to feed "livestock" to feed the billion poor people in the world who go hungry every day.

As with climate change, it is the poor who suffer most from the impacts of animal agriculture.

2) How can the Environment Assembly make a significant contribution to Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a global scale? In doing so, you may take into account the preparation for the meeting, its conduct and follow-up, as well as its relationship to other meetings and processes.

To ensure that the Environment Assembly makes a significant contribution to Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a global scale, we propose that the preparation and conduct of the assembly should:

- ensure that a massive awareness raising campaign about these issues is undertaken for governments at all levels and for civil society in preparation for UNEA.
- ensure that the victims of these environmental impacts as well as experts knowledgeable about them are invited to share their experience in the UNEA.
- find ways to encourage and ensure that UNEP member states from all regions, many of whom rarely attend the UNEP meetings, physically or virtually, treat such attendance as a priority so that the environmental policies discussed can trickle down to the grassroots stakeholders.