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Discussion Document for Agenda Item 8 (c)

Draft declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session

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Discussion Document -- Not for quotation or citation. The purpose of this document is to facilitate discussions during the Second Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, 5 – 8 September 2017, Bangkok. Comments are welcome and should be sent to uneproap@un.org.

Zero Draft of the Ministerial Outcome Document of the 2017 UN Environment Assembly “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”

1. In South America, young mothers like Maria handle raw mercury in artisan gold mines, because it is the only way to make a living. In North America, families like the Kellogg’s relocate to areas where their children can play outside without fear of an asthma attack. In Europe, schools like Fatima Gunic hoist flags in the playground to monitor air pollution. In Africa, communities like Ogoniland try to survive in land saturated by oil pollution. In the Middle East, residents in places like Khuzestan must breathe through the growing number of sand and dust storms swallowing their homes and closing their schools. And in Asia, people like 13 year old Lim Seong-joon are crippled because of chemicals being used incorrectly. In fact, during the next hour, another 1,500 people around the world will needlessly die from environmental causes.

2. We, the world’s ministers of environment, gathered for the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, declare that this cannot and will not continue. We commit to securing a pollution free future for our people and planet. And we commit to working with every possible stakeholder to rapidly explore and implement every possible solution to end the pollution of our air, soil, freshwater and oceans.

3. As the representatives of 193 nations, we believe that, regardless of gender or culture, faith or wealth, no child should die from dirty water or poor hygiene. Yet today, nearly 2,000 children below the age of five will do just that. No one should choke because they walk down a street or cook a hot meal in their home. Yet every day, 9 out of 10 of us will continue to breathe air that is unsafe and 20,000 people will die because of it. No community should be contaminated by hazardous chemicals and waste. Yet of the 130,000 chemicals on the market, only a fraction is properly tested, labelled or tracked. No ecosystem should be so damaged by consumer choices that it ceases to function properly. Yet every year, we dump up to 13 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans and 50 million tonnes of electronic waste on our land. No one should be left behind as we strive to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or other international agreements. Yet it is still the poorest and most vulnerable people in society who are disproportionately affected; often paying the price for the action of the wealthiest.

4. This Assembly agrees that everyone on this planet has an equal right to live in a clean environment, with access to safe water, food and air. These are the most precious of natural resources. Any threat to them is a threat to our health, our society, our economy, our security and our very survival. Pollution is not new, but with the population expected to reach 10 billion people by 2050, these self-imposed threats have never been greater or more preventable.

5. However, we also agree that with leadership, determination, collaboration, knowledge and technology, our options for turning these threats into opportunities are increasing just as fast. The transition to a pollution free planet is not only achievable, but can help tackle poverty, improve health, reduce global warming, build peace, protect human rights, create jobs and drive economic growth. We must recapture and reinvest the 300 tonnes of gold buried in electronic waste every year; the \$100 billion in plastic packaging being thrown away; the \$1 trillion economic loss from exposing children to lead in paint; and the \$5 trillion spent on healthcare because of air pollution. To do so, we must dramatically scale up and accelerate the solutions that countries, cities, businesses and individual citizens are already using. Therefore, we acknowledge the magnitude of threats and opportunities reported in *Towards a Pollution Free Planet* serve and commit to preventing, mitigating and managing pollution in every form by:

- Supporting the development, collation and use of reliable scientific data. This includes better multidisciplinary indicators; more efficient data gathering and monitoring; easier access to and wider availability of information; and an increase in awareness raising and knowledge sharing. This will promote evidence based decision making in the public and private sectors, effective standard setting by all stakeholders and greater participation by citizens from all walks of life.
- Targeting pollutants with focused environmental agreements and tailored action. This will be achieved in two ways. Either by developing global policy to prevent, reduce and control pollutants where the science is clear, but actions do not yet exist. Or by increasing research on pollutants where the impact is not yet clear.
- Cultivating economic productivity and job creation by using incentives to increase innovation and the uptake of new technology. This make it easier for producers and consumers to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and services.
- Nurturing integrated urban development to create more livable villages, towns and cities, which thrive in harmony with the surrounding environment. This includes accelerating the sound management of chemicals and waste, encouraging responsible lifestyle choices, prioritizing access to clean energy and transport, and leveraging the power of big data.
- Promoting fiscal incentives to stimulate systemic and behavioural changes. This includes internalising the true cost of pollution in financial decisions and redirecting investments from the short-term profits of polluting activities to the more sustainable profits of greener alternatives.
- Strengthening and enforcing more integrated policies, regulations and laws. This will be achieved by supporting institutions and building capacity; bolstering monitoring and accountability systems; and sharing best practices, standards, policy instruments and tools.
- Creating and expanding partnerships across the United Nations, as well as with governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and individual citizens. This includes emphasizing enormous potential of partnerships between different stakeholders among developing nations.

6. As ministers of the environment, we recognize that we are accountable for delivering on those commitments. As just a few of the 7.5 billion people living here, we urge our fellow citizens to recognize that every one of us is responsible for making that happen. And, as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, friends, colleagues, neighbours and communities, we cannot overstate the need to make it happen quickly. In the time it has

taken you to read this declaration, some 200 people have died from environmentally modifiable factors; nearly half of that just from breathing.

7. Therefore, we warmly welcome the resolutions adopted at the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. We applaud the many pledges from diverse stakeholders that address critical environmental challenges. And we restate our commitment to work towards a pollution free planet for present and future generations.