

JOINT STATEMENT

Enabling dietary shifts immediately to curb environmental destruction and prevent the next pandemic

21 February, 2022

Inger Andersen

Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme

United Nations Avenue

Nairobi, Kenya

HE Mr Espen Barth Eide

President of UNEA

Minister of Climate and Environment of Norway

Dear Ms Andersen, dear Hon. Barth Eide,

Ahead of UNEA 5.2, with UNEP about to celebrate half a century of protecting our environment and in the context of a climate emergency that requires immediate actions, we write to urge you to **put sustainable and healthy food systems and animal agriculture at the center of the agenda of UNEA 5.2 this month and to also strongly encourage shifts towards more plant-rich diets in the climate and environment discussions.**

At COP26, hundreds of countries pledged to stop deforestation and to reduce methane emissions by 2030. Industrial animal agriculture, primarily the production of animal feed and beef, is one of the leading causes of deforestation¹ and is responsible for almost a third of global methane emissions. While the FAO estimates that livestock contributes 14,5% of global greenhouse gas emissions², a more recent study showed that this could be closer to 20% of total emissions.³

The UN Environment Programme, especially under your leadership and with the focus around nature-based solutions, has been leading the way in making the connection between food systems and the global environmental challenges we are currently facing. UNEP's *Making Peace with Nature* report from last year insists correctly and importantly that "Changing the dietary habits of consumers in

¹ UNEP, Why do forests matter? Available at: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/forests/why-do-forests-matter> [16.03.2021]

² Gerber, P., H. Steinfeld, B. Henderson, et al. (2013): Tackling climate change through livestock: a global assessment of emissions and mitigation opportunities. FAO, Rome.

³ Xu, X., P. Sharma, S. Shu, et al. (2021): Global greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice those of plant-based foods. *Nature Food* 2(9), 724–732. doi:10.1038/s43016-021-00358-x

developed countries by reducing the demand for animal products would improve human health and reduce the pressure on land, water, biodiversity, and the climate system.”⁴ For example, a shift to plant-centred diets could reduce the land use of food by up to 76% – or about 3 billion ha,⁵ an area the size of Africa. This shift should take place in a manner that ecosystems – e.g. forests, wetlands, oceans-, are not further degraded, but actually restored and conserved so that they can continue to support food security, water availability, enhance resilience, and store and remove carbon from the atmosphere.

At the same time, experts agree that the increasing demand in animal-sourced proteins is a key driver in the emergence of zoonotic diseases⁶ and antibiotic resistance, both of which could be mitigated by reducing the world’s reliance on animal agriculture.

Many of the 143 NGOs that have signed-on to this letter have been working with the UN and UNEP for many years. Today, we would like to ask UNEP to join us in advocating for a shift towards more sustainable and less resource-intensive food systems. This would be of particular importance for countries from the Global North. UNEP could, for example, leverage agreements, such as an MoU with the European Union, and organise dedicated roundtables and events at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, including a “Food Day”. The following two actions could initiate such a shift:

- Acknowledging the links between factory farms, environmental destruction, and the increased risks of zoonotic outbreaks. UNEP could **establish an action plan to enable an end to industrial animal agriculture in regions with an excessive dependency on animal-based protein** and accelerate a shift towards plant-sourced proteins.
- Persuade governments, especially in the Global North, to take food systems and the dietary shift towards **increased consumption of plant-based proteins into account when updating their NDCs and climate-mitigation strategies** at the UNFCCC in coming years.

With a noticeable increase in the public demand for alternative proteins, we are now seeing the emergence of a paradigm shift in our food systems. This is the moment for accelerating this shift – for the sake of both human and planetary health.

⁴ UNEP, Making Peace with Nature, 2021, available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>

⁵ Poore, J. & T. Nemecek (2018): Reducing food’s environmental impacts through producers and consumers. Science 360(6392), 987–992. doi:10.1126/science.aaq0216

⁶ UNEP, Preventing the next Pandemic. Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32860/ZPKMEN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet you and your team at UNEA and discuss solutions and actions that would facilitate a food-systems change that will benefit food security, food safety, and public health, while lowering environmental impacts and improving animal welfare.

Yours truly,

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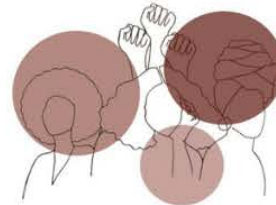


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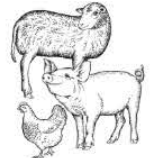


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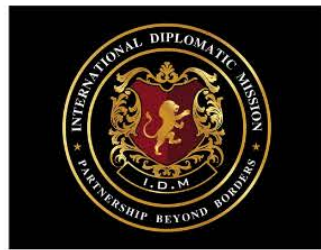
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