

UNEP/BRS' statement – 45th session of the Human Rights Council, Friday 18 September 2020:

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues & friends, this statement is on behalf of the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, the Secretariats of **the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions ('BRS')** on **chemicals & wastes** and of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury**, four UNEP-administered Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) sharing the objectives of protecting the environment and human health.

We first wish to congratulate the new Special Rapporteur, Mr. Marcos Orellana, for his appointment in July, and we very much look forward to continuing a fruitful and long-standing collaboration with the mandate, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary. We would also like to thank the previous Special Rapporteur, Mr. Baskut Tuncak, for his much valuable contribution over the past six years.

We welcome the report presented at this session, which focuses on the duty to prevent exposure to COVID-19, highlighting good practices and key recommendations for both States and businesses. This incomparable sanitary crisis worldwide has exacerbated certain issues related to the implications for human rights of the Environmentally Sound Management (ESM) of chemicals and wastes especially medical waste, on which UNEP and BRS have been working with dedication as a priority; and such extraordinary situation has commanded more effective protective measures from exposure, in particular towards the most vulnerable including indigenous peoples, women, children, health workers among many others. In this effort, UNEP and OHCHR recently published joint key messages on "[Human Rights, the Environment and COVID-19](#)" to assist States to build back better from COVID-19 while putting the people and the planet at the heart of the response.

Yet we would like to recall another but 'silent pandemic', due to chronic exposure to hazardous chemicals and wastes, causing pollution and other adverse effects on human health (from an early stage of development, i.e. on the 'unborn') and on the environment.

In particular, UNEP stresses that the recognition of the right to a healthy environment by the UN is urgently needed to ensure that the right is enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. UNEP would like to commend the efforts of the 850+ civil society organizations – environmental, human rights, women's, indigenous peoples', children's organizations -- who have come together from all corners of the world to call for the recognition of the right at the global level.

In time of unprecedented global challenges since the creation of the UN 75 years ago, we are fully committed to continue supporting the work of the Council, cooperating with the OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur(s) to fulfil our respective and mutually supportive mandates, in achieving our common goals.

Thank you very much for your attention.