

22 April 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature
to Commemorate International Mother Earth Day**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Respected Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you a warm welcome to the High-level Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature, as mandated by resolution 67/214.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to acknowledge my gratitude for the important role that the Plurinational State of Bolivia has played in bringing this issue to the General Assembly.

Let me also emphasize my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, for his strong leadership in galvanizing global action on the nexus of challenges that have brought us together on this occasion.

Excellencies,

Living harmoniously with nature requires us to foster a balanced, ethical and non-exploitative relationship with our planet. We have a common duty to maintain the Earth's health and integrity, as our very existence is fully dependent on it.

Climate change, deforestation, pollution, desertification, the melting of ice caps, the degradation of land, and the exponential increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, are all consequences of the harm we are doing to the environment.

In my opinion, the irreversible torrent of physical and ecological transformations across the globe is threatening us with a future reality that is profoundly different from anything that we have experienced until now.

We have known about this for many years. In a speech delivered to the General Assembly on November 8th 1989, the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke of the "prospect of irretrievable damage to the atmosphere, to the oceans, to earth itself" should the international community continue to disrespect the "balance of nature." "Reason," she continued, "is humanity's special gift. It allows us to understand the structure of the nucleus. It enables us to explore the heavens. It helps us conquer disease. Now we must use our reason," she concluded, "to find a way in which we can live with nature, and not dominate nature."

More than two decades later, the challenge has become all the greater. As we consume our natural resources at an increasingly faster rate than we can replenish them, we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the planet's ability to support our continued existence.

Excellencies,

It has now become a widely-accepted public-policy paradigm that humanity's future material advancement must be consistent with the tenets of sustainable development.

Last June at the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders agreed that it is "necessary to promote harmony with nature [...] in order to achieve just balance among the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations." They also "recognize[d] the need for broader measures of progress to complement GDP in order to better inform policy decisions," and "call[ed] for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will [...] restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem."

At the same conference, the General Assembly was tasked with defining the SDGs, putting forth options for financing them, and laying out a workable intergovernmental arrangement for monitoring their implementation.

These three workstreams are in the service of conceptualizing the post-2015 agenda. Inputs will also be provided in the time ahead by several other initiatives. One will be the concluding report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, which was created in the wake of the Rio+20 Conference. This will take place at the end of May, when its co-chair, His Excellency Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the President of Indonesia, will present its findings to the Secretary-General and the General Assembly.

Another will be the Special Event to Follow-up on Efforts towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It will be held on September 25th, during the High-level Segment of the General Debate of the 68th Session. The Special Event will be the final occasion for Heads of State and Government to decide on actions that need to be taken to complete the MDG process, and how this fits with our endeavors to conceptualize a universal transition to sustainability.

What we do over the next thousand days will frame much of the UN's work for decades to come.

In the months to come, we will need to ensure these and other activities become mutually reinforcing and complementary. I stand ready to help this to the best of my ability.

In this context, allow me to remind Member States that a thematic debate will take place in the General Assembly on May 16th on the topic of "Sustainable Development and Climate Change: Practical Solutions in the Energy-Water Nexus." It is being organized in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates and the newly established United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network spearheaded by the Director of its Secretariat, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University.

Environmental degradation, growing populations, and increasing consumption needs are putting increasing stress on water supplies and energy production, which are becoming more interrelated. In the time ahead, this ‘nexus’ will need to be managed in a more sustainable way, urgently requiring practical and cost-effective solutions, which that event will seek to promote.

Invitations have already been sent out to Member States. I take this opportunity to invite them to participate at the highest possible level. Like today’s interactive dialogue, next month’s thematic debate could help provide important inputs to the various workstreams that must ultimately converge into a single, fully cohesive sustainable development framework.

Excellencies,

“Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left.” These are the words of the pioneering, early 20th-century American ecologist and preservationist, Aldo Leopold.

I hope that participants in today’s interactive dialogue will take his words to heart, as they identify specific areas of enhanced collaboration, as well as the appropriate mechanisms for follow up action.

This will undoubtedly involve the General Assembly, and I want you to know that you can count on my full support.

Thank you very much for your attention.