

Opening Remarks by Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Under-Secretary-General and Director-General, UNON at the UN Civil Society Conference in Support of the Summit of the Future

Thursday, 9 May 2024 (UNON CR 2)

Ms. Carol Ageng'o, [KAROL AGENG-O], Co-Chair of the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference,

Ms. Nudhara Yusuf [NOODARA YUSUF], Co-Chair of 2024 UN Civil Society Conference,

Members of civil society from across the world,

Excellencies,

Senior UN officials,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning. It gives me the greatest pleasure to warmly welcome you all to our magnificent and environmentally friendly UNON Gigiri complex, where the 'greening the blue' initiative comes vibrantly to life!

First, in the context of the recent heavy floods experienced in Kenya that have ravaged the country and the broader East Africa region, I would like to extend the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' message of support and condolences to the Governments and people of the countries affected, especially the families of those who have lost loved ones or sustained injuries as a result of the floods.

The United Nations and its partners are working very closely with national authorities to address humanitarian requirements. Our thoughts remain with those that have been affected.

UNON, as the only UN Headquarter office in the Global South and the largest UN compound in the world at 140 acres, is particularly honoured to host this 69th Civil Society Conference here in Nairobi, as it is the first time it is being held in Africa! This Conference provides a unique opportunity for global civil society and multi-stakeholder engagement and an additional platform to contribute to the negotiations of the Pact of the Future. The conference is therefore a vital prelude to the world leaders' Summit of the Future, scheduled to take place in September 2024 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Civil society plays a fundamental role in shaping a future that, today more than ever, needs multilateral approaches to ensure an inclusive, sustainable, and safe society for all.

As a former civil society leader in my own country, Sierra Leone, I personally know the importance of the critical role civil society plays in representing and advancing the aspirations of peoples across countries, regions, continents and around the world. I therefore encourage each and every delegation here present to make its voice heard and collaborate towards meaningful outcomes for the more vulnerable populations of the world.

As the main service provider to the global operations of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Habitat and the Resident Coordinator System in 165 countries around the world, UNON remains a key partner in supporting UN operations globally and a trailblazer in its sustainability walk, being the first-ever UN Secretariat entity to be awarded the prestigious ISO 14001 certificate in January 2023 for environmental management. Similarly, as part of the Secretary-General's Efficiency Agenda, UNON became the first pilot of the Common Back Office (CBO) initiative which went live on 01 January

2024 - a strategic shift towards greater operational coherence and efficacy among the UN's many agencies based in Kenya, to better support programmatic engagement and delivery to those who need our services most.

UNON is currently undergoing a historical transformation that will not only boost our journey towards energy neutrality, but also biodiversity with the complex-wide reforestation initiative launched by the Secretary General exactly 1 year ago. Also bringing much-needed improvements to the UNON complex infrastructure are two key capital construction projects. First, is the Replacement of office blocks A-J, which includes the refurbishing of all existing office blocks as well as the construction of 6 new office blocks. Second, is the significant planned upgrade of our Conference Facilities coined the Gigiri Master Plan (GMP). With a combined value of approximately USD 340 million, these two projects represent the single largest capital investment undertaken by the UN Secretariat to date in Africa.

I take this opportunity to thank Member States for their unwavering support to date, as well as acknowledge the Government of Kenya for its continued collaboration and significant contributions toward this milestone effort in the form of road network and infrastructure improvements in, around and leading to the Gigiri area.

Once again, allow me to welcome you all to our beautiful Gigiri complex, and I wish you very successful deliberations.

Asanteni na Karibuni! [Thank you and Welcome!]