TITLE: A triple scientific response to the triple planetary crisis

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to Nairobi for the second session of the Open-Ended Working Group for the establishment of a Science-Policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. My thanks to Dr. Mohamed Khashashneh for his opening remarks and to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for hosting this meeting, notwithstanding the change in venue.

The world is facing a linked triple planetary crisis. The crisis of climate change and the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss have, of late, been the centre of national and international attention and action. But the crisis of pollution, waste and chemical exposure is also intensifying. I do not need to tell you what this means in terms of deaths, economic losses, and damage to nature and the climate. You are here because you know the stats. And because you want to make a difference.

Over the last year, the frameworks for addressing chemicals, waste and pollution have expanded and strengthened. The Global Framework on Chemicals was passed in Bonn. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an instrument on plastic pollution made great progress in advancing the draft. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework included a specific target on curbing pollution. The Minamata Convention and the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and the Ozone Convention, held their Conferences of the Parties. Many of you took part in these negotiations. My thanks for your work.

But to build a greener future, we need a stronger science-policy interface for chemicals, waste and pollution. An interface that identifies critical issues. Outlines solutions. Guides policy action and investment. This is why, at the fifth UN Environment Assembly, member states agreed to establish the Science-Policy Panel you are creating. Climate has the IPCC. Biodiversity has IPBES. You have the chance to create a triple scientific panel response to this triple planetary crisis.

If done right, this panel can make a big difference across the whole triple crisis – because unsound management of chemicals and waste also harms the climate and nature. The key question is, how do we do it right? Please allow me to offer up some thoughts.

One, build strong links to policy.

Science is knowledge. Knowledge is power. But power must be used for anything to move. So, science must translate into swift action. You may have heard some IPCC scientists recently calling for more powers. As climate change accelerates, they want to have more of an impact. I'm sure we can understand their frustration. Now, I'm not saying that the IPCC should reform. That's a decision for the IPCC and Member States. And the IPCC has done a stellar job. I am saying that you are creating something new. So, you have the chance to set up this panel in a way in which it delivers a big policy impact. This is a goal that should be at the forefront in your minds.

Two, be broad and forward-looking.

Yes, the panel will look at the drivers and pressures. But we really need solutions. Alternatives. Transformational pathways. Pathways that also bring benefits across the full triple planetary crisis and promote sustainable development. This means integrating not just natural sciences, like chemistry or biology, but perspectives from economics, social and behavioural sciences. The bigger you think, the bigger the impact.

Three, be inclusive.

Global change cannot be influenced by a small group of people from specific countries and specific socio-economic groups. So, for, example, solutions from local communities, indigenous peoples and others must be considered. Because often these people are on the receiving end of pollution. Industry must be involved. Because they are on the giving end of pollution. Working with industry, of course, will require solid measures to avoid any conflict of interests and resist lobbying.

Friends,

You have a lot of work to do, but we need the panel to start working as soon as possible, for obvious reasons. Every day, every month, every year that passes costs lives, money and planetary harm.

UNEA asked this group to complete proposals by 2024. So, by the end of this session, all elements of the proposals will need to be on the table, to leave time for finalization before the next OEWG meeting in June 2024, for forwarding to the Intergovernmental Meeting that will consider the establishment of the Science-Policy Panel.

I wish you every success in your work and look forward to hearing the outcomes of this session.