

Fourth African Animal Welfare Conference

September 7 – 10, 2020

Welcome Remarks on behalf of UNEP, by Alexander Juras, Chief Civil Society Unit, UNEP, September 7, 15.30h

Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends!

I would like to welcome you in the name of The United Nations Environment Programme and its Director Mrs. Inger Andersen to the 4th Animal Welfare Conference **“Animal welfare, wildlife and environmental conservation for sustainable development in Africa: Enhancing nature-based solutions.”**

This meeting is not only the fourth conference of its type, but also the fourth time that UNEP works closely with the African Network for Animal Welfare and other partners in organizing this important event that is unique for Africa. Since the first conference this event has developed considerably, in terms of participation, quality and most importantly impact and it can now be said that the yearly African Animal Welfare Conference became a light house event for the region, bringing together representatives of NGOs, Academics, Governments and also the private sector.

The theme of this year’s conference is very close to that our own flagship event, the United Nations Environment Assembly, UNEA that will be held next year with the theme: **“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”**. You will have the opportunity to hear more about UNEA and UNEP’s work in the area of Animal Welfare during the next couple of days, from Jorge Laguna, Secretary of the Governing Bodies of UNEP, and other UNEP colleagues.

When we started planning together with ANAW and the *African Union Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources* for this conference, we hoped to have a physical meeting in Ghana but then came the Covid Pandemic and we were forced to organize this meeting as an online event.

Many of us were initially skeptical whether an online event will have the same impact and participation. After having organized in the meantime many online events, I can state that while there are certainly disadvantages of virtual conferences compared to physical meetings, there are also many advantages. Virtual conferences allow for more participation, and outreach, they are creating more equality among participants and they allow for being more flexible in terms of time. Finally, the ecological footprint of virtual meetings is much smaller than that of a physical meeting.

Still, we are all trying to learn how to best organize online events and I am kindly asking you to bear with us and to remain patient if not everything goes smoothly. We have an excellent team of experts at our hand that will be able to solve all problems.

The format of this conference is not only a *result* of the COVID Pandemic. The conference itself will also be a *response* to the Pandemic that the Secretary of the United Nations, Mr. Antonio Guterres, called “...one of the most dangerous challenges this world has faced in our lifetime.”

During the conference, we will discuss the causes of the Pandemic and its effects. Discussing about lessons learned will help to avoid similar outbreaks in the future, of a disease that jumped over from animals to human beings.

Allow me to finish with thanking our partners from ANAW, the Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources and others for their excellent cooperation and flexibility in organizing this event and my UNEP colleagues. I am sure that an exciting meeting is in front of us and I am confident that it will result in progress and concrete actions for the betterment of Animal Welfare.

Thank you very much.