



Speech by Inger Andersen

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My thanks to the Financial Action Task Force for the invitation to speak today on how we can work together to combat environmental crime – for the benefit of our climate, nature and, of course, people.

Many of us are feeling the sting of the triple planetary crisis. In climate change, which is intensifying deadly and disruptive weather extremes. In nature and biodiversity loss, which is undermining our ability to feed ourselves. In pollution and waste, which is killing millions of people each year.

Environmental crime is not the sole culprit in this crisis. Our whole systems are to blame. But environmental crime is a major driver. And, if allowed to continue, it will hamper our growing efforts to get on top of the crisis.

The numbers speak for themselves. At COP26 in Glasgow, nations committed to end deforestation by 2030 – a major contribution to holding global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. But illegal logging accounts for 15-30 per cent of the timber trade.

The sustainable development goals commit humanity to a raft of targets, including ending hunger and poverty. But global losses from illegal fishing cost up to USD 36.4 billion per year.

Many conventions regulate hazardous substances, from e-waste to banned refrigerant gases. Yet transnational criminal gangs and unscrupulous companies traffic banned substances and dump illegal waste. Health issues follow for marginalized communities. Similarly, conventions protect species and ecosystems and yet rare endangered species are harvested, sold, and exported.

Such crimes have major economic, social and peace impacts. Environmental crimes put USD 91-259 billion in the pockets of criminals annually, depriving governments of tax income. Environmental crimes deprive people of sustainable livelihoods, as unscrupulous actors take advantage of low-income communities to loot their resources. Environmental crimes damage peace, security and stability – from bankrolling armed groups to claiming the lives of those who defend the environment.

I know people are standing up to the criminals. Many of you are attending this event. I admire your commitment. But you need help. You need backing, funding and, crucially, stronger environmental rule of law.

The recent global recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a step in the right direction. With a strong commitment by states, international organizations, communities and citizens, we can uphold this right. We can help to put money where it does good. For example, curbing illicit financial flows could almost halve the USD 200 billion annual financing gap Africa faces to achieve the sustainable development goals. We can help to deliver on the Paris Agreement, the new global biodiversity deal, to be agreed next year, and other global and regional agreements on everything from chemicals to clean seas.

To get there, though, we must tackle the issue at the right scale, with the right partners.

### **We need to act globally.**

Seizures of hazardous substances, wildlife and natural resources show that trafficking often occurs across borders. We at UNEP host several global Multilateral Environmental Agreements that identify activities harmful to the environment. We need to strengthen and back these agreements to target the transnational trade.

Equally, those who control our borders need the skills to stop environmental crime. Through the Green Customs Initiative, UNEP and its partners build these skills. For instance, we supported the Dominican Republic to roll out a Green Customs Curriculum.

### **We need to act regionally.**

UNEP is home to regional seas treaties and action plans, including efforts to regulate marine litter and plastic pollution. Through the Regional Enforcement Network for Chemicals and Waste, UNEP helped 25 countries in Asia Pacific improve their control of the illegal trade in chemicals and waste. 865,000 tonnes of hazardous chemicals and harmful waste were seized during the project. More such successes would go a long way in cutting environmental crime.

### **We need to act nationally.**

Countries can do a great deal within their borders. This is why UNEP is supporting member states to improve transparency and accountability on environmental crime in legislatures, judiciaries and policymaking.

**Friends,**

We can minimize environmental crime by working together across boundaries and showing dedication and consistency. We can minimize environmental crime by using the law to protect organizations and individuals that are risking their lives to defend the environment. We can minimize environmental crime by ensuring that people have real and sustainable economic opportunities, thus removing the leverage of criminal groups.

The work FATF is doing is vital in this fight. The fight will be long. It will be hard. But if we work together, we can succeed. Thank you.