

## STATEMENT

### **INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JAN BEAGLE**

#### **WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**

5 June 2021

On the 5th of June 1972 – the day now annually celebrated as ‘World Environment Day’ – leaders convened for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the first major global conference on international environmental issues. That day, almost 50 years ago, also marked a major milestone in the development of international environmental law: the Conference’s outcome document, the Stockholm Declaration, was the first international agreement to acknowledge the intrinsic connection between ecological management, economic development, and human well-being.

Since then, we have observed the development of many international legal instruments related to the environment, and an overall increased awareness of states and civil society of the disastrous effects of deforestation, biodiversity loss, and global warming. Nevertheless, our environment is in greater peril than before, and the significance of this day has only grown. Since 1970, global warming has accelerated at an increasing rate. Biodiversity is under threat, as nearly one million species are threatened with extinction within decades. And the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters have put state capacity under greater strain and human lives at greater risk.

While ecological degradation, pollution, and climate change affect us all, it disproportionately affects people living in conditions of vulnerability and marginalization, particularly women and youth, and those living in lower-income countries and fragile states, who have contributed the least to climate change. This impact is also distributed unequally across time, as future generations will cope with the consequences of present-day choices.

In these challenging times, good governance and the rule of law are critical to safeguarding our Earth and its ecosystems, on which human communities and livelihoods directly depend. There is already ample evidence that the collapse of healthy and biodiverse ecosystems has widened inequalities and undermined the stability and prosperity of societies, especially those that are the worst-equipped to resist such shocks. It is with these crises in mind that the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), will focus on the mitigation and reversal of dangerous ecological decline.

IDLO endorses World Environment Day 2021’s theme of “Reimagine. Recreate. Restore.” In that spirit, we call for reimagined and sustainable approaches to environmental preservation and climate resilient development models that empower citizens and communities and balance the needs of the present with the rights of the future.

IDLO is determined to contribute to this effort. Robust, effective legal institutions are critical to achieving these transformative changes. We support the development of laws and regulations that serve to mainstream biodiversity, promote conservation, and empower civil society and communities to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

While ecological degradation exacerbates conflict and migration, IDLO is working to reduce the key drivers of these crises, and to advance the necessary conditions for peace and security through a combination of legal empowerment and institutional development approaches. In several countries around the world, we have partnered with justice institutions and civil society to strengthen the customary and non-customary rights of climate-vulnerable groups to land and other natural resources, and to ensure that they can participate in and benefit from a just use of their countries’ natural wealth.

We cannot reverse environmental degradation overnight. But we can provide timely and much-needed assistance to those at greatest risk from its negative impacts in the meantime, while making strides towards the ultimate goal of stopping and repairing the damage being done to our environment.

As the international community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and looks to the future, IDLO stands ready to support climate justice initiatives to help build and maintain a healthy environment for future generations.

*The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.*