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2018 HLPF Thematic review of progress towards achieving SDG 15: “Youth Perspectives on Climate Change”

Thank you. My name is Chiagozie Udeh from Nigeria. I am from Plant-for-the-Planet, speaking on behalf of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth.

Our generation is the last one with the hope of solving the climate crisis. Recent research shows that if global “warming is not kept to 2 °C, flood costs without additional adaptation could increase to US\$ 14 trillion per year and by 2100 sea level rise could cost us US\$ 27 trillion per year.

Every year, we are faced with exacerbating loss of our cherished biodiversity and forest cover. Last year alone, the world lost forest equivalent to the whole of Italy over the year. Massive land degradation and desert encroachment across the world is fuelling fragility and insecurity. Induced loss of agricultural livelihood is causing young people in the northern part of my country to fall prey to money offered by Boko Haram.

In Somalia, Al Shabaab earn an estimated \$10 million in levies it imposed on charcoal trade in regions under its control, increasing inter-communal clashes. Our lust for war and greed for profit is undermining our collective ability to address climate change.

So today I want to tell you a story.

Eleven years ago, 10-year olds at a German school started planting trees. Why? They had learned in class that tree-planting is one of the most effective ways to tackle the climate crisis. That trees are the only machines we currently have that reliably can capture carbon.

These kids inspired others to join them. After one year they had planted 50,000 trees. After three years, one million. Today, we are 70,000 children and youth in 66 countries. Our mission, is to plant trees and spread the importance of planting trees.

After reaching our first goal of planting one million trees, we asked ourselves: what is our next target? So we had two big questions: How many trees exist in the world? And how many more trees can we plant?

Yale University conducted a three-year study, providing us two important answers: The world has three trillion trees – that's 400 trees per person. And we could restore another one **trillion** trees.

If we stop deforestation and restore one trillion trees, we would capture 25% more carbon. This is a critical step in closing the gap on our Paris ambition.

Restoring these trees will create tens of millions of jobs in the global south. They will enhance ecosystem services such as watershed protection and erosion control, they will alleviate poverty by creating new income streams, and they will improve the health of our people. Restoring forests contributes to all SDGs.

In March 2018, Plant-for-the-Planet launched the Trillion Tree Campaign – together with Prince Albert II of Monaco, and Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC.

To show that restoring forests at a large scale is feasible, Plant-for-the-Planet started a model planting project in the Yucatan Peninsula. We employ 100 local people who plant one tree every 15 seconds – 6000 trees every single day. We do so with a survival rate of 94%, compared to the global average of 30%. And it costs just one Euro per tree.

Restoring at scale is possible and is currently the only silver bullet we have in carbon sequestration. Let's plant a trillion trees.

Today I come with recommendations:

Right now, many countries lack efficient accounting mechanisms for our treasured natural assets, making it difficult for many member states to achieve SDG 15. Developing nations need help in measurement. And I should add, young people need to be part of Voluntary National Reviews in all member states to support it, and track progress or a lack of it.

We must strengthen education about biodiversity and forests.

We must have indigenous people at this table, recognising them as the crucial knowledge holders and priority stakeholders.

Technological justice must be delivered. A lot of the hard work needs to be done in the Global South where there is a huge technology deficit that must be bridged.

We need governments and businesses to put an end to deforestation and illegal logging. Initiatives such as the REDD+ programme can only do so much against the wave of destruction.

But there is something even more disheartening.

Money talks, and you are making it very clear to us that you do not care about biodiversity and natural environment that the world so desperately relies on. The G7 spends a combined 854 Billion USD on military budgets each year. Yet since 2015, just \$10 billion has gone into the Green Climate Fund. Is that fair for us and life on land? No, no, no.

We must have greater investment in biodiversity, and greater transparency of that investment.

There are still some lingering question of what indicators we use to measure progress on SDG15. Do we rate countries on number of existing trees, forests or protected areas? Why is there no economic value of ecosystem services as indicator? What about measurement of degradation?

We already have the means to combat the world's most pressing issues and we can not wait any longer to take action. We should build on and invest in our natural systems that have been providing us with life and opportunity since our first people - intact, resilient land ecosystems. One trillion trees is just one road of many.

Let's do the right thing - show that you value trees, forests and other land based ecosystems. SDG15, our biodiversity and our forests give us a chance to achieve all of the SDGs. Let's not postpone what we can achieve today, it is only 12 years to 2030.

Thank you.