

## **Full interview transcript: Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP and Daniela Chiaretti for *Valor Econômico***

*This interview took place before COVID-19 was declared an international emergency by WHO.*

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *In 2020 there will be a huge IUCN conference in France and also the UN biodiversity conference in China. What do you expect from these moments?*

**Inger Andersen:** I think of 2020 as a super year for the environment. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) will kick-in, we need to formulate the post-2020 biodiversity framework and we will see multilateral discussions on chemicals and waste, oceans and much more. I have high expectations because now, perhaps more than ever before, the state of nature, and what its decline means for humanity, is evident.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *When did this awareness arise?*

**Inger Andersen:** This awareness is thanks to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, a global panel of experts) which issued a landmark report last year. The report says that one million out of almost eight million species face extinction. Current negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems are projected to undermine progress towards 80 per cent of the assessed targets of the Sustainable Development Goals [*SDGs are a set of universal goals that replaced the UN Millennium Goals*] related to poverty, hunger, health, sustainable consumption and production, water, cities, climate, oceans and land.

**"The climate emergency cannot be solved by any one country alone. Our environmental challenges face no borders."**

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *What are your expectations for CoP 15, the UN conference on biological diversity in October in China?*

**Inger Andersen:** CoP 15 is a critical meeting during which we expect nations to formulate and commit to stronger action for protecting biodiversity. The IUCN World Conservation Congress, to be hosted by France in June 2020, will serve as an important springboard towards the CoP15. We hope that member states will come to these meetings with concrete and detailed plans as well as strategies for their implementation to ensure we halt the massive degradation we have inflicted on nature.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Can the environmental crisis jump out of “ecological bubbles” and reach other parts of society?*

**Inger Andersen:** Yes. 2020 also provides an opportunity to ramp up the start of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration from 2021 to 2030, intended to massively scale up the restoration of degraded and destroyed ecosystems. It is also a way to fight the climate crisis and enhance food security, water supply and biodiversity at the same time. I expect these events to take the conversation about biodiversity outside the corridors of the environment sector to businesses, supply chains, finance ministries, infrastructure providers and urban development and beyond.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *UNEP’s latest Emissions Gap Report says that countries’ climate ambitions must increase over fivefold to get on track towards 1.5°C by 2100, and three times for 2°C. Even if this message is clear, do you believe that governments will follow it?*

**Inger Andersen:** We cannot afford to waste any more time. Our collective failure to act early and hard on climate change means we now must deliver deep cuts to emissions – over 7 per cent each year if we break it down evenly over the next decade. We need countries to stay at the table, negotiate and engage. It is crucial to step up ambition on Nationally Determined Contributions and reach agreement on contentious issues like Article 6, which deals with carbon markets. Countries can’t wait until the end of 2020, when new climate commitments are due, to step up action.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Are countries prepared to increase ambition in mitigation, adaptation and finance?*

**Inger Andersen:** We have no choice. We have a responsibility to leave a livable planet for future generations. Already, we are seeing leadership from countries across the world. Some members of the G20 – responsible for 78 per cent of global emissions – are taking some important steps in the right direction. The EU has seen a steady decline in emissions of one per cent per year over the last decade and current policies put the region on track to achieve emissions reductions of 40% by 2030. China committed US \$758 billion in renewable energy capacity over the last decade. In the United States, over 100 cities have made 100 percent clean energy commitments.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Are they copying small polluter movements?*

**Inger Andersen:** Well, Costa Rica has drafted a detailed plan to decarbonize its economy by 2050. At the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit in September, 77 countries committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, while 70 countries announced they will either boost their national action plans by 2020 or have started the process of doing so.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *But the big emitters are not really moving.*

**Inger Andersen:** My job is to be optimistic and realistic. Of course, the biggest emitters have to do more, but everyone can contribute more.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Who is really responding to the climate emergency? The private sector? Young people?*

**Inger Andersen:** The response to the climate crisis is across the board. We are seeing young people respond vocally and move powerfully to claim a seat at the table and call us to account.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *What about the private sector?*

**Inger Andersen:** We are seeing the private sector, at the CEO level, stepping up. Over 100 business leaders delivered concrete actions to align with the Paris Agreement targets and speed up the transition from the grey to green economy, including asset-owners holding over \$2 trillion in assets and leading companies with a combined value also over \$2 trillion. Over 100 cities, including many of the world's largest, announced concrete new steps. Of course this progress is not nearly enough to achieve the Paris targets, but we can see more understanding of the situation and greater momentum towards decarbonization.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Nationalist governments seem to see the climate and environment agenda as something related to the political spectrum of the left. How can that thought be broken?*

**Inger Andersen:** We call on all countries to stay at the table, to engage, and to negotiate. The climate emergency cannot be solved by any one country alone. Our environmental challenges face no borders.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Do you think these issues are ideological?*

**Inger Andersen:** Not at all. This is Science. There are facts and evidence telling us to act. Left, right or governments from the center are making clear commitments. We have seen governments changing from one political side to another but maintaining their climate commitments. The United Kingdom recently declared a climate emergency, and this is with a conservative government. There is no ideology with these issues. And there are many governments – with different political currents and different political understandings of what can work best – who are acting.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Why is it important to preserve the Amazon? How did you see last year forest fires?*

**Inger Andersen:** The Amazon is the largest rainforest on the planet and is incredibly important, alongside others, such as the Congo Basin and Indonesia. Understanding what is driving the forest fires is critical, which is being amplified by a world experiencing climate change. But it is necessary to recognize that Brazil was a strong environmental actor for decades and was also proactive in achieving a significant decrease in deforestation by 2012.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Just a step back: why is the Amazon forest so important for the world?*

**Inger Andersen:** Well, trees and forests perform photosynthesis. Biomass absorbs carbon during its growth and produces oxygen. Moreover, these large forests, whether in Africa, Asia or South America, produce a lot of humidity and rain. They are important for establishing global climate patterns.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *How do you view the rise in deforestation in Brazil?*

**Inger Andersen:** The Amazon, alongside the world's other large forests, is a natural and vital defense against global warming. The sustainable management of forest resources will be essential in saving the environment and our planet. Failure to halt the damage will cause severe impacts to human health and livelihoods, decimating rich biodiversity and leaving the world more exposed to climate crises and other disasters. Brazil has always played an important role in climate governance and we expect the country to continue – and indeed increase – its climate commitments.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Why did UN Secretary-General António Guterres express his concern about the Amazon forest fires?*

**Inger Andersen:** I think many of us, myself included, have expressed concern not to point fingers, but just to say how critical the forest is in ensuring the stability of global climate patterns, as well as being home to 32 million people and 40,000 plant species. When wildfires of this scale are seen, we also express our concern for the carbon stock. A large volume of CO<sub>2</sub> is being emitted, and biological diversity as well as forest communities' way of life are being lost.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Is it really possible to preserve and develop at the same time? To preserve and to reduce poverty? Decouple economic growth from pressure on natural resources?*

**“WE HAVE NO CHOICE. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LEAVE A LIVABLE PLANET FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS”**

**Inger Andersen:** If we cut down forests, rainfall patterns will change, forests will become poorer and species will be lost. This means losing long-term sustainability. There were countries that polluted and cut down their forests in search of wealth – this has happened in the past. But now there are so many of us that we can no longer continue to expand on what has never been touched. So, moving over the original environment is like cutting off the bench on which we are sitting. I believe that there are many people in Brazil, and in other parts of the world, with an awareness of the vital need to preserve while also reducing poverty. We have to seek out opportunities and cannot leave anyone behind, ensuring that people living in poverty will have long-term opportunities. But we cannot aim for immediate results, in which ecosystems are exploited in a non-renewable way.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Even if governments go the other way, can people help the climate with their daily choices?*

**Inger Andersen:** Certainly. We see people choosing more sustainable lifestyles. People are helping the climate every day by consuming less than their own carbon footprint and making choices that cause less logging. There are so many actions that we can take that are good for the climate at a local as well as a global level. We can all respond to this urgent call to ensure that we leave a livable planet for future generations.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *What damage can the US cause by leaving the Paris Agreement?*

**Inger Andersen:** We are stronger together, and multilateralism works best when we are all working together. We of course urge all countries to stay at the negotiating table on climate change. We are encouraged, however, by the fact that many US cities, sub-national authorities, businesses and people remain committed to bold climate action and taking action on decarbonizing the economy. This ranges from the approval of legislation that promotes moving to renewable energy to supporting electric vehicles.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *What is the biggest environmental challenge this year?*

**Inger Andersen:** The UN Secretary-General has said that climate change is the challenge of our time. There are countries that could disappear, such as island states, cities that could suffer from flooding, and areas that could lose GDP due to drought. Over the last five years, we have experienced the hottest years in history. There are 1.1 billion people facing immediate climate risks and 4.5 billion people have been affected by disasters in the past decade. We must be more ambitious in decarbonizing our economy, financing countries that are in need, seeking innovation and new opportunities in energy generation and transportation, and investing in nature-based solutions that can help us find solutions for capturing carbon. We have to have more ambition.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *What are your priorities at UN Environment?*

**Inger Andersen:** I mentioned climate change, biodiversity and oceans. Our job is to provide governments with the correct data and information, and the framework in which their actions to decouple economic growth from the exploitation of natural resources, decontaminate and decarbonize take place. Each of these elements is essential so that countries can make the ecological transition and ensure that we have sustainable consumption and production. From the way we consume to how we produce, live and generate waste, each of us makes choices every day that affect the planet.

**Daniela Chiaretti:** *Are governments aware that they can be punished in the future for situations like this, such as the fires in the Amazon? Not only by other governments, but also by the choices of consumers and companies?*

**Inger Andersen:** I believe that the greatest punishment will come from Mother Nature, who will punish us if we do not act. Unfortunately many people are already experiencing this revenge, even though they have not done anything themselves. Emissions were not created by small islands or produced by poor countries. They were not generated by the places that are now suffering the most. That is why it is really important that we decarbonize our economies, to ensure this punishment is not even bigger in the future.