

ANNEX 3
Statement by Slovakia

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STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTRIES LISTED BELOW DELIVERED DURING **the 34th session of the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), under Item 6: “Report of the Secretary of the MAB Programme”**.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following countries **Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.**

To date, eight Ukrainian biosphere reserves have joined the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves. These territories, where local people live peacefully surrounded by unique nature, are a haven for dynamic wetlands and forests, rare flowers, countless molluscs, and hundreds of fish species. These reserves are home to migratory birds, a large number and variety of animals, some of which are included in the IUCN Red list.

Tragically - for almost four months now - these biosphere reserves, which strive to be model regions for sustainable development, have been deprived of any development due to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine. Russian forces have entered or conducted military operations in some of Ukraine's protected natural areas, including the UNESCO-designated Desnianskyi, Chornomorskyi, and Askaniya-Nova biosphere reserves.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine publishes reports outlining the damage the Russian aggression has already caused to Ukrainian ecosystems. Research has shown that ecosystems rarely recover from war and that the consequences are felt for decades. The environmental costs of war are insidious and quietly harm people and wildlife for decades even after the fighting has ended. Thus, Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine has created on top of a human tragedy, an environmental catastrophe.

We urge Russia to stop its harmful actions and remind it of its obligations under the constitution of the UNESCO, the Lima Declaration on the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Russia has an obligation to respect the natural heritage of Ukraine.

As UNESCO is developing an independent and coordinated data assessment mechanism in Ukraine, it is essential that this review process takes into account the damage caused by Russia's brutal war to Ukraine's biosphere reserves. Russia must be held accountable for all its actions, including what may amount to crimes against the environment or harm to biodiversity.

The environment and the people who live in it are once again the silent victims of conflicts and wars, and it is the duty of this Council to give them a voice. Remember

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that the programme is called "Man and the Biosphere", so it is not only about the protection of the environment, but also about ensuring harmony between humanity and nature.

The cosponsors of this statement welcome the election of Mr Pavlo Chirenko as a Vice-chair to the Bureau of the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme

Thank you.