



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 20TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME GOVERNING COUNCIL MONDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 1999

On the first day of the 20th Session of the UNEP Governing Council (GC), delegates met in Plenary to adopt the agenda, elect officers and address organizational matters. They also heard opening remarks from youth organization representatives, outgoing and incoming GC Presidents and the policy statement of the UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer. In the afternoon, the Plenary and the Committee of the Whole (COW) met in parallel sessions. The Plenary addressed policy issues and the COW began consideration of programme, the Environment Fund and administrative and other budgetary matters.

OPENING PLENARY

Ambassador Sid-Ali Ketrandji (Algeria), acting GC President, opened the 20th session of the GC, and called upon Shafqat Kakakhel, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, to deliver a message from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He noted that the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) reaffirmed the role of UNEP as the UN's principle environmental body. He remarked that the UNGA has yet to take a decision on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Report on Environment and Human Settlements, and emphasized the importance of the GC's discussions on reform. He noted the linkages between environment, sustainable development, poverty eradication and peace making. He stressed the need for a solid manifestation of the UN in Africa, and the importance of a strong and defined role for UNEP within UN reform.

Representatives of Youth Organizations highlighted a new youth advisory council for UNEP and called for youth involvement in legislation of environmental laws and for strengthened support of the UNEP youth programme. Jorge Jimenez G. (Venezuela), on behalf of Arnoldo Jose Gabaldon, outgoing GC President, noted strides towards overcoming the institutional crisis UNEP faced when elected President in 1997. He identified the Nairobi Declaration as a clear expression of UNEP's role in the UN system and noted reform achieved in establishing the High-Level Committee of Ministers.

Ambassador Ketrandji underscored innovative priorities of the work programme and UNEP's proposed plan of action to strengthen its relationship with the Global Environment Facility (GEF). He noted that this session will create a new universal covenant for the environment and an expression of universal solidarity. Francis Nyenze, Kenyan Minister for Environment and Conservation, expressed gratitude for UNEP's support for Africa. He supported UNEP's activities related to: emergency response capacity; early

warning assessment; coordination of environmental policy instruments; protection of water resources; and technology transfer, and requested adequate, stable and predictable funding for UNEP.

The Plenary elected the Bureau for the GC's 20th session: President László Mikló (Slovak Republic); Vice-Presidents Jean P. Nsengiyumva, (Burundi), Leandro Arellano (Mexico) and Jan Pronk (Netherlands); and Rapporteur Hossein Fadaei (Iran). President Mikló said that UNEP's continuing role should be intersectoral and take into account development perspectives. He emphasized the important role of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in strengthening UNEP's transparency and said Dr. Töpfer's appointment had helped restore confidence in UNEP. He said a functional orientation was a precondition for an integrated approach, particularly with respect to freshwater and environment and human settlements.

The Plenary adopted the agenda and agreed to the organization of work (UNEP/GC.20/1/Rev.1 and UNEP/GC.20/1/Rev.1). President Mikló announced that Plenary would discuss the Secretary-General's Report on the Environment and Human Settlements. EGYPT, on behalf of the Africa Group, noted commitment to reaching consensus on the issues. JAPAN, on behalf of the Asia Group, expressed sympathy to the Colombian people in light of the recent earthquake. BANGLADESH, on behalf of G-77/CHINA, said trying to reach decisions on the UN task force report could preempt the UNGA's continuing work, and supported, *inter alia*, a higher budget in view of likely contribution increases and a move toward joint implementation of GEF projects.

Dr. Töpfer delivered the policy statement of the Executive Director. He noted the impacts of the recent economic and financial shocks in Southeast Asia and Latin America on the global environmental agenda, and reiterated that economic dynamics should not result in long-term reversal of environment policy or the belief that environmental protection is dispensable. He highlighted progress in revitalizing and restructuring UNEP, including a new functional and integrated structure and the strengthening of regional offices. He said the proposed 2000-2001 biennial budget of \$US119.41 million included \$US100 million for programme activities. He emphasized that this is the minimum budget necessary for UNEP to regain essential effectiveness, critical mass and operating capital.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

The COW convened under Chair Leonardo Arellano (Mexico), and David Swao (Kenya) was elected Rapporteur. Dr. Töpfer provided introductory remarks on programme, the Environment Fund and administrative and other budgetary matters, highlighting the proposed programme budget for the bienniums 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 (UNEP/GC.20/22). He characterized the budget as reflecting income projections, noting that the trend of decreasing contributions to the Environment Fund was reversed in 1998. He explained that the budget increase from \$US107.5 million (1998-1999) to \$US119.41 million (2000-2001) reflected an inflation rate



of 10.3% and not a significant budget increase. He highlighted a 15% reduction in management and administrative support costs, and projected an additional 8% reduction in 2000-2001. Töpfer noted programme support staff costs had been transferred to UNON in July 1998. He said the top heaviness of the UNEP Secretariat had also been addressed.

Töpfer noted that UNEP is shifting from a sectoral to a functional based programme and detailed the budget distribution for the seven new subprogrammes: environmental assessment and early warning; policy development and law; policy implementation; technology, industry and economics; regional cooperation and representation; environmental conventions; and communication and public information. He noted intention to fully implement the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) observations and recommendations.

EGYPT, on behalf of the Africa Group and supported by INDIA, on behalf of G-77/CHINA, ALGERIA, BURUNDI, CHINA, COLOMBIA, CUBA, KENYA, TUNISIA and MEXICO supported the proposed budget. He also stressed the need for strengthening UNEP's regional office for Africa. The US and JAPAN said that the proposed budget for the 2000-2001 biennial is overly optimistic and expressed concern over how the money will be spent. NORWAY said that despite being optimistic, the budget can still be reached with of increased government contributions. MEXICO called upon UNEP to move from words to deeds. ALGERIA said the word "realistic" was offensive, stressing that the figure of US\$100 million is a minimum for giving UNEP any credibility. CANADA said discussions should focus on how to help UNEP gain credibility, and asked for information on the Secretariat's grounds for optimism. The INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE underscored the importance of the panel's work and urged all governments to increase contributions.

Dan Claasen, UNEP, introduced the subprogramme area environmental assessment and early warning (UNEP/GC.20/22) and review of the Mercure satellite communication system (UNEP/GC.20/30). He said the focus of the subprogramme area will be on building UNEP's capacity to link environmental observations to assessment and early warning in a timely manner. He highlighted UNEP's efforts to strengthen provision of scientific information.

SWITZERLAND said that environmental assessment and early warning will be improved with the mobilization of funds and the creation of a new division in UNEP's Secretariat. Supported by AUSTRIA, she pointed out errors in the ACABQ report regarding Mercure, and expressed concern over criticism of the system's efficiency. CUBA underscored the importance of the environmental assessment and early warning in preventing natural disasters. The US requested UNEP to further its work in data collection and analysis and communication with decision makers. COLOMBIA supported the Mercure system. INDONESIA underlined the dependence of countries on environmental assessment and early warning systems that do not have such facilities.

PLENARY

Vice-President Jean P. Nsengiyumva (Burundi) opened the afternoon Plenary and proposed that all policy issues be discussed together. GERMANY, on behalf of the EU, the CZECH REPUBLIC, CUBA and CHINA supported the second Global Environment Outlook (GEO-2) report. AUSTRALIA, supported by POLAND, suggested a longer period of development between GEO-2 and GEO-3. ARGENTINA supported broadening participation and efficient networking in GEO-2 report preparation. CANADA supported stronger links between GEO and other UNEP assessment work, a longer term funding mechanism or strategy and better focused, more consistent data. He noted collaborating centers, such as the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), are learning to prepare regional assessments.

The EU urged: cost estimates for proposed decisions; a vital role in environmental law; a step-by-step approach to funding for public information services; closer cooperation with the World

Trade Organization; and an integrated gender approach. He discouraged the establishment of an environmental emergency stand-by team and the elaboration of related legal instruments. NORWAY welcomed: strategic partnerships, particularly in relation to centers of excellence; strengthened roles for NGOs; and work on cleaner production and consumption patterns and legal instruments. The EU, with NORWAY, CHINA, INDONESIA and POLAND, supported an enhanced role of UNEP within the GEF. IRAN discouraged any duplication of roles. The US called for comparative advantage regarding UNEP's role in GEF activities.

INDONESIA emphasized strengthening UNEP's institutional capacity building activities, including support to developing countries for legal redress, and emergency response and early warning capacities. ARGENTINA stressed the need for governments to establish administrative and legal procedures to deal with the environment. POLAND expressed anxiety concerning the establishment of the Environment Management Group (EMG), preferring a more detailed analysis of failure within the Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group. JAPAN and IRAN urged further elaboration of the EMG concept. POLAND expressed skepticism regarding UNEP's ability to address environmental emergencies, but proposed an expert roster list for consultation.

The CZECH REPUBLIC encouraged: a more aggressive role in trade, investments, tourism and the environment; greater synergy and enforcement of conventions; strengthened involvement in environmental law, training and education; and greater intensification of bilateral and multilateral assistance in relation to cleaner production and biodiversity. BURKINO FASO said a special consultation on drought and desertification was urgent and, with the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, emphasized the transfer of environmentally sound technology. JAPAN encouraged UNEP to focus on issues where it has a comparative advantage, including: environmental assessment and monitoring; development of environmental laws; and technology transfer. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA supported the provision of information on environmental emergencies. The US opposed a global right-to-know convention.

IRAN underscored the need to: enhance interregional cooperation; support the role of women; and understand the autonomy of conventions. CUBA welcomed a new environmental law programme and continued efforts to decentralize, particularly in relation to education and training. CHINA encouraged: greater coordination with governments and UN organizations, an emphasis on monitoring, assessment and an early warning system; environmental law programmes; and enhanced transparency. JAMAICA stressed free access to environmental information and strengthening of the Joint Unit to deal with environmental emergencies. The SEYCHELLES highlighted the issue of coral bleaching. The OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS said it would help implement relevant GC decisions.

ON THE ROADS TO GIGIRI

Although the UN site at Gigiri was calm, delegates worried about returning to their hotels in the center of Nairobi, where more than a thousand students were rioting. Government troops and police have routinely beaten and arrested those protesting destruction of the nearby Karura forest, which is in the same watershed as the UN Headquarters. Reports circulated through the breezeways and on the news wire that the Ambassadors from Japan and Uganda had been pulled from their cars and "roughed up."

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

COW: The COW will convene at 9:00am in Conference Room 1 to continue consideration of programme, the Environment Fund and administrative and other budgetary matters.

PLENARY: The Plenary will meet at 9:00am in Conference Room 2 continue discussions on policy issues.

SIDE EVENTS: A panel discussion on chemicals will be held from 12:00–2:00pm in Conference Room 1.