OPENING CEREMONY

Opening the first universal session of the GC, Federico Ramos de Armas, Spain, outgoing GC President, called for urgent action to change unsustainable consumption and production patterns and to move beyond Gross Domestic Product as a measure of prosperity.

Reading a message from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Sahle-Work Zewde, Director General, UNON, inter alia: underscored investment in the environment and in the green economy as a “sound insurance policy” for the future we want, and highlighted UN General Assembly discussions on financial resources for UNEP from the regular UN budget.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, addressed that delegates have the task of promptly implementing the Rio+20 outcome aspects regarding the functioning of UNEP and the design of the international agenda for cooperation on the environment pillar of sustainable development.

Describing the first universal session of the GC as “historic,” Mwai Kibaki, President of Kenya, noted that the Rio+20 outcome has reaffirmed UNEP as the leading global environmental authority by adopting several decisions to strengthen and upgrade UNEP.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: The plenary elected Hassan Abdel Hilal, Minister of Environment, Forests and Physical Development, Sudan, as GC-27/GMEF President. Ryutaro Yatsu (Japan), Antonio Otávio Sá Ricarte (Brazil) and Idunn Eidheim (Norway), were elected Bureau Vice-Presidents; and Beata Jaczewska (Poland) was elected Rapporteur.

GC-27/GMEF President Hilal highlighted the need to agree on the future participation of ministers and the institutional arrangements and capacity within UNEP, and to discuss UNEP’s contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

GC President Hilal informed delegates that the first universal session will follow the GC applicable rules of procedure and the applicable rules and practice of the General Assembly.

The provisional agenda (UNEP/GC.27/1) was adopted. On the organization of work (UNEP/GC.27/1/Add.1), GC President Hilal outlined the Executive Director’s recommendations, including the establishment of a COW, a drafting group, and a working group on institutional arrangements and rules of procedure. A COW was established with Idunn Eidheim (Norway) as Chair. Luis Campuzano (Mexico) and Farrukh Iqbal Khan (Pakistan) were appointed co-chairs of the working group on institutional arrangements and rules of procedure. Delegates agreed on the GC-27/GMEF’s organization of work.

POLICY STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: UNEP Executive Director Steiner highlighted the need to articulate an environmental agenda that addresses issues such as energy, employment and poverty. Steiner said the Rio+20 outcome moved that agenda forward, and noted that delegates have a clear mandate from the UN General Assembly to implement the outcome’s paragraph 88, and decide how the newly mandated governing body of UNEP will function. He outlined UNEP’s contributions over the years, including the Rio+20 discussions on green economy, its work on black carbon as a complement to climate action, the finalization of a mercury treaty, and improved synergies in the chemicals and wastes cluster. He emphasized UNEP’s increased efficiency and improved value proposition, noting the programme of work entails a modest budget increase.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES: H.E. Geert Aagaard Andersen (Denmark), Chair of the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), submitted 12 CPR draft decisions for consideration, noting bracketed text remained, including on the decision on the Consultative Process on Financing Options for Chemicals and Wastes, which is bracketed in its entirety. He said the draft decision on the green economy was bracketed because of insufficient time for its consideration.

Reiterating support for a stronger more effective UNEP, the US stressed the need to resolve structural governance issues pertaining to universal membership. She called for, inter alia: a review of UNEP’s Strategic Framework; a clear and more defined role for the CPR; a mechanism for enhancing stakeholder participation; and addressing the frequency and effectiveness of meetings to avoid overloading UNEP’s agenda. With CANADA, the US also expressed concern regarding the President of the session, noting that Sudan is currently subject to UN Security Council sanctions and therefore is not an “appropriate choice for leadership.” MALAYSIA introduced a draft decision on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Secretariat.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS: Delegates convened for a panel discussion and a plenary dialogue. Princess Lalla Hasna, Morocco, highlighted the work of the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Protection of the Environment in promoting young people’s environmental education and activities.
that sought to implement the Rio+20 outcome. COLOMBIA
Steiner, said the COW had before it fourteen draft decisions
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
annual meetings of the universal body.
reflected in its designation; an enhanced role for the CPR; and
KENYA noted that the legitimacy of the reformed GC must be
goals: energy, sustainable cities, water, food security and oceans.
for providing UNEP with the necessary tools to coordinate the
development.
EU called for further steps to adopt green economy polices
context of Rio+20. He observed that human rights law can help
incorporate nature-based solutions.
On the green economy, the
stakeholders into the reformed UNEP, among other things, will
question of how to integrate
the context of Rio+20. He observed that human rights law can help
to inform the SDGs and fundamental rights to environmental
MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE: On the green economy, the
the Eu called for further steps to adopt green economy polices
at all levels and for a convergence of work on the MDGs and
On implementing the Rio+20 outcome, MEXICO called
for UNEP as the leading voice of the environment at the global
level. Some delegates reflected on how a reformed UNEP marks
and upgrading UNEP, ARGENTINA expressed support for
strengthening UNEP, but said upgrading the Programme was
beyond the GC’s mandate.
BRAZIL, with INDONESIA, called for a thorough
consideration of the rules of procedure, including the need
to address gaps on matters like the mechanism for NGO
participation.
NEW ZEALAND, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
SIERRA LEONE, IRAN, EGYPT and INDONESIA, called for a
stronger UNEP regional presence.
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION underlined that structural
changes should neither increase bureaucracy nor place a greater
financial burden on member states.
COW Chair Eidheim forwarded the discussion to the working
group on institutional arrangements and rules of procedure.
Budget and Programme of Work: The Secretariat
introduced documents on the budget and programme of work for
the biennium 2014–2015 and the Environment Fund and other
budgetary matters (UNEP/GC.27/9/Add.1; UNEP/GC.27/10/
Add.1 and/Add.2; UNEP/CG.27/11/Rev.1; UNEP/CG.27/14/
Rev.1; UNEP/GC.27/INF/6 and/Add 1; UNEP/GC. 27/INF/7;
and UNEP/GC.27/L.1)). BOLIVIA said the proposed programme of work is based on
the green economy and does not accurately reflect the balanced
Rio+20 outcome. NORWAY said the overall 2.7% budget
development.
 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE: On the green economy, the
the EU called for further steps to adopt green economy polices
at all levels and for a convergence of work on the MDGs and
SDGs aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable
development.
On implementing the Rio+20 outcome, MEXICO called
for providing UNEP with the necessary tools to coordinate the
environment activities of the UN system and, with IRAN, to
strengthen the science-policy interface. ARGENTINA cautioned
against creating a new and costly supranational body, preferring
from what already exists.
GERMANY asked for the creation of an ombudsman for
future generations and supported a “UN Environment Assembly.”
COLOMBIA highlighted the need to have SDGs of a
universal nature and proposed the following five areas for the
goals: energy, sustainable cities, water, food security and oceans.
KENYA noted that the legitimacy of the reformed GC must be
reflected in its designation; an enhanced role for the CPR; and
annual meetings of the universal body.
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Amina Mohamed, on behalf of Executive Director Achim
Steiner, said the COW had before it fourteen draft decisions
that sought to implement the Rio+20 outcome. COLOMBIA
introduced a draft decision on oceans (UNEP/GC.27/CRP.3),
stressing that it sought to give greater visibility to the need
for the integrated management of oceans. Tanzania, for the
AFRICAN GROUP, urged delegates to consider, inter alia:
strengthening existing bodies rather than creating new ones;
a clear roadmap for moving UNEP headquarter functions and
offices to Nairobi; and establishing sub-regional offices in Africa.
Rio+20 Implementation: The Secretariat introduced
information documents on the work of the CPR (UNEP/GC.27/
INF/4), and on resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly
of relevance to UNEP (UNEP/GC.27/INF/3 and/INF/3/Add.1).
INDIA, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the US,
INDONESIA and others, favored strengthening the CPR.
On stakeholder involvement, MAJOR GROUPS said
they would table comprehensive principles for stakeholder
participation. Ireland, for the EU and CROATIA, with
AUSTRALIA, the US, CANADA, NORWAY and others stressed
the importance of stakeholder involvement. On strengthening
and upgrading UNEP, ARGENTINA expressed support for
strengthening UNEP, but said upgrading the Programme was
beyond the GC’s mandate.
BRAZIL, with INDONESIA, called for a thorough
consideration of the rules of procedure, including the need
to address gaps on matters like the mechanism for NGO
participation.
NEW ZEALAND, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
SIERRA LEONE, IRAN, EGYPT and INDONESIA, called for a
stronger UNEP regional presence.
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION underlined that structural
changes should neither increase bureaucracy nor place a greater
financial burden on member states.
COW Chair Eidheim forwarded the discussion to the working
group on institutional arrangements and rules of procedure.
IN THE BREEZEWAYS
The first “universal session” of the UNEP GC opened on
a very high note, with widespread enthusiasm for the new
membership status of the Council and the recent boost given
to UNEP as the leading voice of the environment at the global
level. Some delegates reflected on how a reformed UNEP marks
a coming of age for the programme, and the advancement of
the sustainability agenda at large. With the sense of urgency
to rapidly advance the environmental pillar of sustainable
development, delegates were excited at the prospect of having
the institutional tools to make their mark. Others felt the
need to reflect on what this meeting means for the post-2015
development agenda.
Stakeholders, who had met over the weekend, were eager to
see how governments would react to their proposal of principles
for stakeholder participation. The question of how to integrate
stakeholders into the reformed UNEP, among other things, will
be something they will be keeping a watchful eye on.