



UNEA-2 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 23 MAY 2016

The second UN Environment Assembly of the UN Environment Programme (UNEA-2) opened Monday at UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. In the morning, delegates heard opening statements, and adopted the agenda and organization of work. The Committee of the Whole (COW) met in plenary through the afternoon. A drafting group began consideration of resolutions in the evening.

The Sustainable Innovation Expo (SIE) also opened today and held discussions on: South-South cooperation; big data and innovation; and air quality.

OPENING PLENARY

Outgoing UNEA President Oyun Sanjaasuren (Mongolia), opened the conference, inviting delegates to observe a minute's silence to remember those who have lost their lives in protecting the environment.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner described UNEA-2 as an expression of hope and a clarion call for the world, noting that "we truly have a UN Environment Assembly," with well over 2000 participants, 170 nations, and hundreds of stakeholders represented.

Speaking on behalf of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Ibrahim Thiaw, UNEP Deputy Executive Director, welcomed UNEA-2's focus on action, collaboration and partnerships among all levels of society. He emphasized 2016 as the year the world begins to turn its sustainable development ambitions into reality.

Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General, UN Office at Nairobi, thanked Steiner for his efforts over the past 10 years to strengthen UNEP and promote Nairobi as the environmental capital of the world.

Judi Wakhungu, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Regional Development Authorities, Kenya, urged delegates to work towards "amicable compromise" on decisions that would drive global action on the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Sanjaasuren said that SDG implementation is crucial, and encouraged regional engagement with the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), highlighting the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2015 as an example.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK: The plenary elected Edgar Gutiérrez Espeleta (Costa Rica) as the president of UNEA-2. Amina Mohamed (Nigeria), Emmanuel Isoze Ngondet (Gabon), Jassim Humadi (Iraq), Ramon Paje (the Philippines), Vladislav Smrž (Czech Republic), Nebojša Kaluderović (Montenegro), Dennis Lowe (Barbados) and John Matuszak (US) were elected Vice-Presidents. Roxane de Bilderling (Belgium) was elected Rapporteur.

Gutiérrez said the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change demonstrate the need to change traditional development paradigms, and require harmonized and complementary national policies to meet the challenge.

Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/EA.2/Add.1/Rev.1) and established a "Friends of the President" group to review the High-Level Segment outcome document.

Gutiérrez invited Julia Pataki, CPR Chair (Romania) to report on the Committee's work. Referring delegates to the CPR's report (UNEP/EA.2/INF.25), Pataki said that the CPR's work would benefit from: the introduction of deadlines for draft resolutions, nomination of the COW Chair in advance of the OECPR, and changing the timing of the Bureau's election.

POLICY STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR: Steiner said the real impact of UNEA will depend on how it sees its leadership role in the implementation of recent international agreements. Noting that the cost of inaction now will be huge for future generations, he urged Member States to allow for differences in priorities and objectives, and to try to find common ground.

STATEMENTS: Highlighting 2015 as a historic year for sustainable development, Argentina, for the G-77/CHINA, stressed the importance of: eradicating poverty in all its forms; recognizing different visions, approaches, and models for achieving environmental sustainability; and supporting SDG 17 on means of implementation.

The EU, with BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, SERBIA and UKRAINE, underscored the challenge of environment-related diseases and forced displacement resulting from environmental degradation. He said UNEA-2 should prioritize: sound management of chemicals and waste; the marine environment; sustainable consumption and production (SCP); the Stakeholder Engagement Policy; and partnerships among stakeholders.

Egypt, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for: reversing natural capital losses; climate action; supporting African States affected by armed conflicts, environment loss, desertification and land degradation; and addressing the illegal trade in wildlife.

Argentina, on behalf of GRULAC, called for the High-Level Segment to clarify UNEP's role in the 2030 Agenda and stressed the specific vulnerabilities of small island developing States (SIDS). She also encouraged boosting the role of regional and sub-regional offices, including in intersessional activities.

Sri Lanka, on behalf of the GROUP OF 15 (G-15), said the Group is promoting the 2030 Agenda's integrated approach to sustainable development, including through regional forums. He called for technology transfer and capacity building, especially for uptake of renewable energy technologies.

PAKISTAN said that a sustainable development approach is needed to support viable economic growth, citing a World Bank study that estimates environmental pollution and climate change



are costing Pakistan around one billion rupees per day. SUDAN described national efforts to eradicate poverty by instituting progressive, adaptive agricultural practices.

The US favored producing a chair's summary of UNEA-2 discussions. He highlighted the costs of shifting the UNEA cycle, and proposed that UNEA consider holding its sessions in February or March.

MEXICO called for adopting a strong political statement and Stakeholder Engagement Policy, and stressed the need to ensure inclusiveness and participation at UNEA.

JAPAN highlighted his country's partnership with UNEP on the Global Waste Management Outlook, and welcomed the results-based budgeting approach in the draft Programme of Work (PoW) and Budget for 2018-2019. SWITZERLAND called for synchronizing the UNEA cycle with that of other UN institutions, and issuing a strong ministerial statement to guide the work of UNEP, for example, in relation to synergies among the biodiversity-related MEAs, coordinated reporting on chemicals and waste including marine plastic debris and microplastics, and the GEO process.

BOLIVIA expressed concern about a perceived bias toward payments for ecosystem services and other green economy approaches in the resolution text.

SAMOA emphasized inter-linkages between UNEP's implementation of the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway and the SDGs.

The ARAB STATES stressed that UNEA-2 must lay a robust foundation to guide countries' work in addressing key environmental challenges. IRAQ said the outcome document should reflect the growing impact of sand storms. INDONESIA and KIRIBATI highlighted the importance of sustainable coral reef management in safeguarding the livelihoods of coastal communities, and KIRIBATI noted difficulties in accessing climate financing. SRI LANKA highlighted the impact of the recent torrential rains and severe landslides in his country, and called for focusing on disaster risk reduction in SDG implementation.

MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS said they would reject the Stakeholder Engagement Policy if it includes the proposed "no-objection rule" which, they said, would amount to a silent veto.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

The COW convened in plenary in the afternoon, chaired by Idunn Eidheim (Norway). Delegates endorsed Husham Al-Fithyan (Iraq) as the COW rapporteur.

Eidheim noted the COW's substantial workload in addressing agenda items on international environmental policy and governance issues (item 4), the Medium-Term Strategy, PoW and Budget and other administrative and budgetary issues (item 5) and the provisional agenda, date and venue for UNEA-3 (item 8) (UNEP/EA.2/1/Add.1/Rev.1). She outlined a proposed work schedule for the COW for 23-25 May (UNEP/EA2/CPR.2). She also proposed a revised clustering of resolutions and chairs for five drafting groups.

Delegates called for regional and political balance in the selection of chairs, and expressed concern about the constraints faced by small delegations in attending parallel sessions. Some proposed clustering the resolutions into three rather than five drafting groups. The EU supported a proposal for drafting groups to be co-chaired, to ensure regional balance.

SWITZERLAND anticipated proposing a new resolution on the timing of the election of the Bureau, and COLOMBIA suggested this be considered in the review of the UNEA cycle (UNEP/EA.2/L.26). COSTA RICA, supported by CHILE, said they would table a new resolution on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT: The Secretariat introduced the Executive Director's report (UNEP/EA.2/9) and the associated draft resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.6), noting that eight countries

and the EU had submitted inputs. Egypt, for the AFRICAN GROUP, highlighted related decisions at the 6th special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. SWITZERLAND stressed that the UNEA outcome should focus on the role of UNEP in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. BOLIVIA expressed concern about the focus on green economy approaches. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS called for a just transition and for policy coherence to achieve the SDGs.

EMERGING AND OTHER RELEVANT ISSUES:

SAMOA introduced their draft resolution on UNEP implementation of the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway to facilitate achievement of the SDGs (UNEP/EA.2/L.5). Delegates agreed to forward this, and a draft on investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training (UNEP/EA.2/L.4), to a drafting group.

On effective implementation of the Paris Agreement (UNEP/EA.2/L.7), NICARAGUA stated that the Agreement is not legally in existence and thus cannot be implemented. SAUDI ARABIA stressed that UNEA should not upset the balance agreed upon in Paris. CUBA, with IRAN, PAKISTAN and BRAZIL, cautioned UNEA not to go beyond its remit by seeking to "cherry pick" from the agreement. SYRIA proposed that the draft should refer to, *inter alia*, building national capacities, providing technical and financial assistance, and supporting countries to submit proposals to the Green Climate Fund. UGANDA called for capitalizing on the momentum gained at the signing of the Paris Agreement to begin implementation. SWITZERLAND proposed that the resolution should focus on UNEA's role in implementing the Agreement, including awareness-raising activities and work on SCP. As the proponent of the draft, the EU proposed to alter the title of the draft to "Support for the Paris Agreement."

Eidheim introduced UNEP/EA.2/L.24 on combating desertification, land degradation and sustainable management of rangelands. SUDAN, supported by NAMIBIA, highlighted the resolution's importance to African countries.

Eidheim also introduced UNEP/EA.2/L.25 on transformation of pastoralism towards sustainable development. ETHIOPIA, supported by the INDIGENOUS PEOPLES Major Group, called for more resources to be devoted to this issue and for the UN to designate an international year of pastoralists.

In the evening, the Bureau met to further consider the COW's organization of work.

DRAFTING GROUP

A drafting group, chaired by Tita Korvenoja (Finland), convened in the evening for a first reading of the six resolutions that were introduced in the COW plenary. Discussions continued late into the evening.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

Light rain did little to dampen the warmth in the breezeways at UNEP Headquarters as a packed conference room got down to work on day one.

While a crowded agenda had been expected, it began to dawn on delegates that there were some fundamental issues with the proposed organization of work. By the end of the afternoon's COW plenary it was still not clear if three or five drafting groups would convene, which resolutions they would consider, and how they would coordinate their work.

On the sidelines, a delegate questioned the wisdom of appointing new cluster chairs to manage the last leg of negotiations, suggesting the process does not draw on the expertise of those who have shepherded the text to its current stage. Another reasoned that the new cluster chairs represent a fresh mandate from UNEA, picking up from the preparatory work done by the Nairobi-based missions.

Amid the confusion, a single drafting group convened in the evening and conducted a first reading, while seasoned observers predicted a long, long week ahead.