UNEA-2 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 26 MAY 2016

The High-Level Segment (HLS) of the second UN Environment Assembly of the UN Environment Programme (UNEA-2) opened on Thursday. UN heads welcomed all delegates, in the presence of President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, who delivered opening remarks.

A ministerial luncheon took place, where high-level delegates were briefed on the previous day’s symposium on mobilizing investment for sustainable development.

Meanwhile, the three drafting groups of the Committee of the Whole (COW) continued to meet to finalize all resolutions for consideration and adoption by ministers on Friday, and the COW held a stocktaking plenary in the evening. Discussions in all three drafting groups continued late into the night.

OPENING OF HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

The UNEA-2 HLS opened with a performance by the Kenyan Boys Choir. In his opening address, UNEA-2 President Edgar Gutiérrez Espeleta (Costa Rica) pointed to the precedent set by the key international agreements of 2015 in moving towards new world paradigms, stressing that UNEP’s cross-cutting priorities coincide with the global challenges and must continue to underpin UNEA’s work.

Outgoing UNEP Executive Director (ED) Achim Steiner expressed his appreciation to Kenya for being “the world’s environmental capital,” noted that the world has entered a new era of environmental governance, and urged UNEA to “look after UNEP and it will look after the world.”

Salaheddine Mezouar, President of the 22nd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP22) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), paid tribute to Steiner’s accomplishments in moving UNEP “from a programme to an institution.” He expressed Morocco’s determination to give credibility and meaning to the global consensus achieved in 2015 by ensuring that COP22 marks the start of implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Séolène Royal, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs and Responsible for International Climate Relations, France, and UNFCCC COP21 President, called on environment ministers to accelerate the ratification of the Paris Agreement, and to prioritize its national implementation.

Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy Secretary-General, highlighted the role of UNEA as the foremost decision-making body on the environment, and drew attention to the landmark 2015 agreements: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. He called for integrated and holistic partnerships to achieve these commitments.

President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya noted Africa has the most to gain from climate change action, and called for support to ensure the continent fulfills its commitments including through “hard and soft investments.” He also called for support for a ban on ivory trade at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) COP17, and underscored the importance of bipartisan and multi-stakeholder partnerships to accelerate progress on addressing environmental challenges.

POLICY STATEMENT: ED Steiner noted the challenges facing UNEP and its successes over its 40-year history, stating that UNEA is the leading global authority on the environment and “there is a moral price to pay in development.” He said that, with UNEP providing the technical support, UNEA can be the science-policy interface to unify the environment and development sectors, recognizing that different solutions may be needed for similar problems in different regions. He called for more action and less debate, saying that solutions to environmental challenges are already available. His words were met with a standing ovation from delegates.

MINISTERIAL DIALOGUES: DELIVERING ON THE ENVIRONMENT DIMENSION OF AGENDA 2030 COMMONALITIES AND COMPLEMENTARITY: JOINING FORCES FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF THE 2030 AGENDA: UNEA-2 President Edgar Gutiérrez Espeleta introduced the session, inviting delegates to learn from one another regarding best practices and gaps that need to be filled.

Chen Jining, Minister of Environmental Protection, China, highlighted China’s 2016-2020 development plan, which lays out targets and indicators for action on sustainability challenges,
such as reducing water use, energy consumption and carbon emissions per unit of GDP, saying its vision is well aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

Elba Rosa Pérez Montoya, Minister of Science, Technology and Environment, Cuba, stressed the importance of updating national legal standards; closer integration of ministries; developing national and harmonizing international indicators; and access to new, non-earmarked and unconditional finance for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Joan Clos, Secretary-General, UN-Habitat, spoke to the tremendous contribution that cities can make to environmental issues but noted an “epidemic of low quality urbanization.” Highlighting the Habitat III conference in October 2016, he stressed the need to reinvent urban planning on the basis of: legislation; physical design; and allocation of sufficient resources.

ENSURING DELIVERY ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS: The HLS continued in the afternoon, moderated by Amina J. Mohammed, Minister of Environment, Nigeria.

Didier Dogley, Minister of Environment, Seychelles, noted that achievement of the 2030 Agenda will require investment of trillions of dollars and effective coordination between stakeholders, and that UNEA and UNEP are best placed to facilitate this. Anyaa Vohiri, Executive Director and CEO, Environmental Protection Agency, Liberia, questioned whether the environment has been shortchanged in the SDGs, and recommended using MEA implementation to break down existing silos.

Speaking on how to improve multilateral cooperation and coordination, Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, highlighted the need to streamline institutional mandates to reduce duplication and overlaps, and build synergies. Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe, discussed regional coordination mechanisms and reported on efforts to build a platform for Regional Economic Commissions to share experiences and learn from each other.

Inger Andersen, Director-General, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, stressed that achieving the 2030 Agenda will require grappling with questions such as how to feed 10 billion people without losing biodiversity, noting the strong role required of environment ministries. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa, noted the need to change the historic “cappuccino approach,” where the three pillars of sustainable development are not equal, and the economy is the coffee, which is favored, while environment is the luxury chocolate on top that is the first to go when times are tight.

Argentina, for the G-77/CHINA, noted the essential role of UNEA in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The EU highlighted the role of UNEP in monitoring progress on the SDGs and in engaging stakeholders, and called on it to foster innovative partnerships, including on fundraising. The AFRICAN GROUP spoke of the investments needed to achieve its Agenda 2063, and to tackle challenges such as illegal wildlife trade and resource use, and irregular financial flows, and create more effective environmental management systems in order to achieve the SDGs. ARAB STATES noted the difficulties arising from conflict and occupation in achieving effective environmental management. The HLS then heard statements by 35 Member States.

Statements can be viewed on the UNEA-2 website: http://web.unep.org/unea/statements

MINISTERIAL LUNCHEON
MOBILIZING INVESTMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ED Steiner convened a luncheon on “Mobilizing Resources for Sustainable Investments” for ministers and heads of delegation to communicate the findings and outcomes of Wednesday’s symposium on that topic, as well as conclusions from other events, including the Business Dialogue for Environmental Sustainability. He said the SDG framework aims to put the US$300 trillion finance sector to work by replacing existing infrastructure stock, including in the energy and transport sectors. He noted that “green finance” would be needed to meet developing countries’ marginal additional costs of leapfrogging to lower-polluting, 21st-century technology.

A number of delegates commented on SDG successes and challenges in their countries, and provided suggestions for how UNEP can facilitate SDG implementation. The head of an international financing organization noted that to achieve SDG outcomes, there would need to be a transformation of energy and food production systems beyond incremental changes, and that achieving such change would require working with the finance sector.

The head of an Asia-Pacific program delivery body outlined some significant green growth developments in the region, where green investment has grown 22% in recent years but still constitutes only around 1% of total investment. In particular, he noted the Asian Development Bank had issued close to US$2 billion in green bonds, including for water and energy infrastructure.

A European delegate noted that governments need to provide an enabling environment for green finance, and that green taxation could boost pressured government budgets. A Caribbean delegate said SIDS need to create partnerships across regions to address environmental issues but must give priority to responding to their populations’ basic needs. He indicated UNEP could help by educating citizens on the need to accept that some costs are involved in addressing environmental degradation. An African delegate noted that commitments on environmental action should be embedded in national strategies and plans that can coordinate action across a range of ministries.

UNEP Deputy ED Ibrahim Thiaw concluded the event, noting the importance of using fiscal policies to provide incentives for positive behaviors and disincentives for behaviors that would harm the environment. He called for a paradigm shift towards financing sustainable projects.
DRAFTING GROUPS

DRAFTING GROUP 1: Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable development of pastoralism and rangelands: Co-Chair Benitez commended the group for progress made on Wednesday evening, noting all but three paragraphs of the text (UNEP/EA.2/CRP.5) were agreed. Following amendments to text calling for synergies with other relevant bodies to reflect the ongoing IPBES assessment on land degradation, the text was agreed for forwarding to the COW.

Sustainable management of natural capital for sustainable development and poverty eradication: The group began consideration of a new draft of the resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.14), which was prepared in informal consultations on Wednesday. Delegates were unable to reach agreement on a paragraph containing compromise language to reflect the need to balance the concept of nature as an economic asset with the principles of the intrinsic value of nature, and national sovereignty. In the evening, following further consultations, an informal group reported that they had developed four alternative texts and were awaiting guidance from capitals on a possible compromise.

Investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training: Delegates briefly returned to this resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.4), and agreed to request the ED to report to UNEA on implementation at a future time. They agreed to forward the resolution for adoption by the plenary.

Role, functions and follow up to the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific: In a second reading of this resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.3), Co-Chair Korvenoja proposed compromise text developed through informal consultations. Delegates debated whether to request the ED to facilitate convening and strengthening of regional forums “upon request of the countries” and “without formal objection.” Delegates eventually agreed to divide the paragraph into two parts to reflect regions’ different circumstances, with the first section addressing existing regional processes without specifying how they are to be convened; and the second addressing other, less established processes and specifying they could be convened “upon request of regions through the intergovernmental process with all countries in the respective regions.” The latter paragraph remained bracketed pending agreement on how to refer to these other regional processes.

Delegates also agreed to change the resolution’s title to “Role and functions of the regional fora of ministers of environment and environment authorities,” making it a general rather than region-specific proposal.

Roles of UNEP and UNEA in delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda: Delegates reached agreement on a paragraph of the resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.6) emphasizing UNEP’s important role “within its mandate” in follow up and review on the progress in implementing the environmental dimension of sustainable development, including the provision of policy relevant information, through assessment processes “which should support the follow up and review by the HLPF of the 2030 Agenda.”

After additional consultations, delegates agreed on compromise text on UNEP’s role in the preparation and follow-up of the Habitat III conference in October 2016, after omitting a reference to the outcome of the conference, as the outcome is yet to be determined. They also agreed on paragraphs on: promoting synergies between MEAs, “recognizing their institutional independence”; and reflecting that the GEO process “covers the internationally agreed environmental goals.”

DRAFTING GROUP 2: Promoting the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change: Open-ended “informal informals” on UNEP/EA.2/L.7 continued on this issue throughout the day. A revised draft was circulated in the evening.

Oceans and seas: The Group continued deliberations on UNEP/EA.2/L.11. Delegates debated a request to UNEP, through its Regional Seas Programme, to support Member States joining regional seas conventions and action plans. They also discussed text calling on contracting parties to regional seas conventions to consider increasing the regional coverage of those organizations. The group forwarded discussions on outstanding issues to an informal drafting group, with a view to reaching a compromise.

Wasted food reduction, rescue and diversion: Delegates discussed this US-sponsored draft (UNEP/EA.2/L.10). In text recognizing that in developing countries, food waste and loss occur in the early stages of the food value chain, delegates debated language noting that this can be traced back to financial, managerial and technical constraints, and that these are mainly a concern of “agricultural actors most concerned with food and nutrition.” Some delegations, opposed by one, preferred to delete language that stressed nothing in the draft would be construed as creating technical trade barriers outside the scope of relevant World Trade Organization agreements. Delegates also debated whether to call on governments to participate in existing international efforts to better measure food loss and waste, and avoid greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Many developing countries preferred to delete references to emissions, saying that there are no international agreements linking food waste to climate change, while some developed countries referred to the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN that links these two elements. The group was not able to agree on a package to delete references to both trade barriers and GHG emissions.

Sustainable consumption and production: This draft resolution (UNEP/EA.2/L.9) was considered in informal consultations during the day, after formal consideration on Wednesday night.

Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products: The group considered this draft (UNEP/EA.2/L.15) proposed by Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe. They debated the use of wildlife “trade” as opposed to “trafficking,” with some pointing to protracted discussions during UNEA-1, and agreed to reference both. Delegates also discussed the role of sustainable use of wildlife and its products in addressing illegal trade, with some
stressing that the inclusion of language on the sustainable use of wildlife products could be a means to allow selective trade, which would undermine the spirit of the resolution.

**DRAFTING GROUP 3: Review of the cycle of UNEA:**
The group considered this resolution (UNEP/E.A.2/L.26) in the morning. They heard advice that the UNEA Bureau favored 2018 as the timing for the next Assembly. Delegates differed on whether 2017 or 2018 would be preferable, with some preferring 2018 to allow sufficient time to finalize GEO-6 before the next Assembly. An informal group was established to discuss the matter further, and the drafting group took up the issue again in the evening.

**Mainstreaming of biodiversity for well-being:** Mexico introduced the resolution (UNEP/E.A.2/L.18), originally intended for consideration in Drafting Group 2 and transferred to Drafting Group 3. He noted that most paragraphs had already been agreed. The resolution calls on Member States to promote an integrated approach in their national policies, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. Delegates applauded the relatively quick resolution to the outstanding issues, including on a reference that might be interpreted as seeking to direct the CBD COP on this issue. Final text was agreed and forwarded to the COW.

**Enhancing the work of UNEP in facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related MEAs:** On this resolution (UNEP/E.A.2/L.19), delegates focused on language concerning the transmission of results from the UNEP-led project on this subject to the COPs of biodiversity-related conventions. Some delegates were concerned about language that might be interpreted as seeking to direct the COPs to implement the project’s recommended actions. A proposal to mention the integration of biodiversity in various sectors “including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism” was opposed by some, who warned that listing some sectors would lead to competing proposals from others. The full text was finally agreed, with the exception of a paragraph addressing cooperation of the biodiversity-related MEAs in follow-up and review of biodiversity-related targets of the SDGs. Some countries were concerned that the text did not reflect the HLPF’s responsibility for follow-up and review at the global level.

**Protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict:** On this resolution (UNEP/E.A.2/L.16), delegates discussed whether proposed text on protecting the environment in times of armed conflict, “including from the impacts of human displacement resulting from armed conflict” could be interpreted as closing borders to refugees. They finally agreed to qualify this as “including from the unintended collateral impacts of human displacement.” On a call to Member States to “consider expressing consent to be bound by relevant international agreements they are not yet Party to,” they agreed to refer instead to international “obligations.” Final text was agreed and forwarded to the COW.

**Field-based environment assessment of the Gaza strip:** Morocco withdrew its proposed resolution, “Field-based environmental assessment of the effects after the November 2012 and July and August 2014 wars on the Gaza Strip” (UNEP/E.A.2/L.17). Delegates conducted a first reading of this alternative resolution, (UNEP/E.A.2/CRP.6), sponsored by the G-77/China. Sponsoring countries expressed strong support for the resolution, stressing its technical rather than political nature. Two developed countries reserved the text in its entirety, while a third delegate suggested amendments to reduce the text to a minimum with a view to increasing the likelihood of its being supported by capitals. An informal contact group was formed to discuss possible compromise text.

**COW PLENARY**
The COW held a brief stocktaking plenary in the evening. Drafting Groups reported that some resolutions had been agreed and that informal discussions were also ongoing. JAPAN and CHILE emphasized the need to have draft resolutions well in advance of future UNEA sessions to allow for more effective review and preparation. BOLIVIA, supported by RUSSIA, said the term “natural capital” is not universally understood and accepted, and COW Chair Eidheim advised that such statements should be confined to the negotiations.

**IN THE BREEZeways**
Emotions ran high as negotiations went overtime on Thursday, after the supposed deadline of Wednesday night. While no more than three sessions in parallel had been promised at the outset, timetabling constraints had led to a mushrooming of informal working groups, to the disadvantage of the smaller delegations. The opening of the High-Level Segment in the morning created a further complication, as harried negotiators yo-yoed between taking care of their visiting ministers and participating in drafting groups – sometimes in response to urgent summons from Co-Chairs unable to advance the discussion in the absence of key negotiators.

Many felt that work done in good faith since OECPR-2 was being torpedoed at the last minute by unexpected, and mostly unilateral, objections. Some saw this as a limitation of the CPR process, while others suggested there had been a lack of attention to building adequate consensus beforehand. Yet others took the view that the extent of disagreement reflected Member States’ increased ownership of UNEA.

There was high praise, meanwhile, for the breadth and interest of the Sustainable Innovation Expo and side events that ran alongside the session. Some delegates questioned why there appeared to have been more thought given to the surrounding events, rather than to the heart of the UNEA process, the actual negotiations. “It’s really a question of priorities,” grumbled one veteran of UN processes.

**ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS:** The Earth Negotiations Bulletin summary and analysis of UNEA-2 will be available on Monday, 30 May 2016, online at: http://www.iisd.ca/unep/unea2/